

NEIGHBORS

FLORENCE MORSE KINGSLEY

FRED M. DEWITT
BOOKSELLER
1609 TELEGRAPH AVE.

1st Ed 50

NEIGHBORS

BOOKS BY
FLORENCE MORSE KINGSLEY

THE RESURRECTION OF MISS
CYNTHIA

THOSE QUEER BROWNS

AND SO THEY WERE MARRIED

THE GLASS HOUSE

THOSE BREWSTER CHILDREN

TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER

MISS PHILURA'S WEDDING
GOWN

THE HEART OF PHILURA

NEIGHBORS

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BY

FLORENCE MORSE KINGSLEY

Author of "The Transfiguration of Miss Philura,"
"The Resurrection of Miss Cynthia," "The Heart
of Philura," "To the Highest Bidder," etc., etc.



NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1917

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NEIGHBORS

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I

“**Y**ES; I guess it looks full es well plain, like that, es any o’ them fancy ways,” mused Miss Bennett, as she gazed at the neat black lettering on its white ground which proclaimed her name and occupation to a waiting world.

“Looks real p’rfessional ’n’ up t’ date,” commented the man in blue overalls who had just affixed the sign to the corner of Miss Bennett’s weatherbeaten little house. “Them that runs c’n read, es it says in th’ Bible. You ain’t had a reg’lar sign all these years, Miss Malvina; but ’taint hard t’ guess why you come to it now. All I got t’ say is: I don’t blame you none.”

Miss Bennett screwed her small features to one side in a comprehensive sniff of disdain.

“I don’t know what you’re a-hintin’ at, Henery Pratt,” she said, with dignity. “I b’en thinkin’ o’ havin’ that sign painted f’r years ’n’ years, off ’n’ on. It’s one o’ them things a body ’ll put off

—like makin' up their shroud, with the goods a-layin' idle in their bureau-draw'."

Mr. Pratt spat controversially upon the ground.

" 'Course you've heard th's a new dressmakin' shop opened up over George Trimmer's store," said he, shifting his quid of tobacco with stealthy enjoyment.

" I bet I heared it b'fore you did," retorted Miss Bennett. " I knowed it b'fore she hed time t' oil up her sewin'-m'chine,—not that she's hed much use f'r it sence. My cust'mers ain't th' kind t' be drawn off that-a-way. Land! ef you was t' see my shop; it's s' cram full o' work I don' know which way t' turn! "

" Wall, anyway, it's a han'some sign you got there, an' I hope 't will be worth a dollar-seventy-fi' t' your business," observed Mr. Pratt, in the act of gathering his scattered tools.

" It looks real dignified 'n' like that, I think," assented the dressmaker. " Ma, she got all het up argufyin' for 'Malvina Bennett, Female Tailoress.' But Ma's kind o' narrer-minded. 'Female Tailoress,' I says, 'don't cover all I do in th' line o' dressmakin' in a single day, let alone a year. I r'member Mis' Deaconess Buckthorn was in th' shop lookin' over th' spring fashions; 'n' she r'marks in that deep, pray'r-meetin' voice o' hern:

'I sh'd advise th' words "Miss Bennett, Man-tua Maker." 'Twould be com-pre-hen-sive an' el'-gant,' s' she. 'Land!' I says, 'what on airth is a man-tua? I never made up one of 'em in m' life, es I know of,' I says."

"A dollar 'n' seventy-fi' cents is dirt cheap f'r a neat, tasty sign like that," stated Mr. Pratt. "'N' you couldn't 'a' done no better 'n' what you done in th' wordin' of it. When you stepped int' my shop two weeks ago yist'd'y I says to you——"

"You mem'ry's better 'n your word, Henery," interrupted Miss Bennett. "You promised me solemn you'd git that sign up on th' corner o' my house inside o' three days. Ef it hadn't 'a' b'en I was lookin' f'r you from day t' day I might 'a' changed m' mind th' last minute an' had 'Malvina, Robes-et-Man-toes.' 'Twould 'a' looked real stylish, n' might 'a' drawed custom."

Mr. Pratt frugally salvaged half a dozen nails from among the sprouting daffodils under Miss Bennett's window.

"Mebbe that's right," he conceded dubiously; "wimin-folks gen'ally runs after what's new an' fancy. The lady over Trimmer's store 's got a black 'n' gold sign 'at reads somepin' like that; an' nothin' would do fer my wife, when she seen it, but t' have her spring suit made b' th' new dressmaker."

Angry tears rushed to Miss Malvina's faded eyes.

"D' you mean t' tell me Sar' Ann Pratt's b'en t' that—that critter t' hev' a dress made?" she demanded. "An' me a-doin' for her constant sence b'fore she married her first husban'—an' makin' up her mournin' 'n' all!"

Her voice choked.

"You might 's well hear it f'om me 's f'om anybody else," grumbled Mr. Pratt, realizing his tactical blunder too late. "I ain't got no m'nop'ly in th' sign-paintin' trade, an' I don't see how you c'n 'xpect t' do all the dressmakin' f'r th' wimin-folks in this ere growin' community. Competition's th' soul o' trade, y' know. . . . Say, I got a bill here f'r th' sign; if you feel like payin' it right now, —same's you 'greed t' do when you ordered it off me,—I'll take off ten cents."

Miss Bennett instantly produced a half sheet of blue-lined note paper from beneath her shawl.

"I c'd 'a' paid you hard money right in your fist jest as well 's not, Henery Pratt, an' I might a done it if Mis' Pratt had been hon'erable enough t' tell me right t' my face she was goin' t' another dressmaker. But seein' she ain't no lady, here's th' items: One card o' black hooks 'n' eyes; half a yard o' featherbone, b'sides m' time an' three quarters of a yard o'——"

Mr. Pratt paused in the act of extracting a much-needed red and white bandana handkerchief from the hip pocket of his overalls to stare resentfully at the dressmaker.

"Wall, I like your nerve!" he exploded wrathfully. "I guess my wife 'll pass fer a lady, f'r all o' you, Malvina Bennett. She never signed up no contract t' let you spile her best clo'es constant, 't I know of."

"Fer pity sake!" cried Miss Bennett, deep scorn struggling with the grief in her voice. "Ef ever I spiled a dress f'r Sar'Ann Pratt—an' her with one hip two inches higher 'n the other, t' say nothin' of bein' hollered in where she'd ought t' be rounded out, an' vice verser in th' back, where her shoulder-blades is sprung—I defy you t' bring that there dress t' my shop an' prove it. Prove it, I say, right in front o' me!"

"Aw, g'long," muttered Mr. Pratt disgustedly. "I clean fergot what m' wife told me. She said you'd be rampin' an' roarin' like a bull of Bashan, if I let on 'bout her goin' t' th' new dressmaker. But she ain't th' only one, I c'n tell you!"

"Rampin' an' roarin' ain't my habit o' speech, Henery Pratt," rebuked Miss Bennett. "An' you c'n tell Mis' Sign-Painter Pratt so. This 'ere bill is fer a black dress-waist I fixed over fer her t' wear to her first husban's sister-in-law's fun'ral.

She 't was Em'line Mills. Sar'Ann was feelin' turrible grief-stricken, I r'member, bein' took back t' th' happy days b'fore she married you, Henery; an' I set up most all o' one night so t' she c'd hev' th' waist in time. She ain't never paid f'r it from that day t' this, an' here 'tis: a dollar 'n' seventy-fi cents f'r work an' findin's."

"Why didn't you show me yer dratted bill when you come t' m' shop t' order th' sign?" inquired Mr. Pratt, in a deeply injured tone. "You never s' much 's mentioned it."

"I was a leetle too cute f'r that, Henery," crowed Miss Bennett. "I knowed full well I wouldn't get m' sign till Gabr'l blowed his trumpet, if you s'picioned you owed me anythin'."

"No more you wouldn't, neither," confirmed Mr. Pratt gloomily. "I got a darn good mind t' smash it."

"What? My sign? Try it, an' I'll git th' law on you!" promised Miss Bennett.

"'Tain't no better 'n gittin' money on false p'r-tenses," growled Mr. Pratt. "An' that'll make you liable, ef I was a min' t' sue you."

Miss Bennett cackled derisively.

"I hope you got *some* sense left, Henery. Receipt that there bill o' yourn; I'll do th' same with mine, 'n' we're quits, 's fur 's money 's concerned."

She watched the man's retreating figure well out

of sight; then with the receipted bill tightly clutched in one hand and the skirt of her dress in the other, she mounted the front steps of the house, pausing to gaze once more at the subject of her late spirited controversy with Mr. Pratt.

"I bet I ketched a 'nawful cold, standin' out there in th' wind all this while," she reflected. "I c'n feel it shootin' up m' jaw this minute. But I don't keer; I got m' sign 'n' it's paid for."

She sneezed a noisy confirmation of her forebodings, as she passed into the "shop" where sat old Mrs. Bennett, patiently pulling white basting threads from the inchoate garment in her aproned lap.

"Fer goodness sake, Ma! ef you ain't drawed them bastin's from around the arm-sizes," protested the little dressmaker. "An' me takin' sech pains t' git th' linin' 'n' th' gathered goods on th' outside jes' so."

"Now, Malviny, don't you s'pose I know what I'm 'bout?" demanded the old lady, keeping fast hold of the disputed garment. "Didn't I teach ye ev'rythin' you know 'bout dressmakin', I'd like t' know? You're a ongrateful child; that's what you be, Malviny Bennett. 'N' there's a verse in th' Bible 'bout a sarpint's tooth——"

"I know it, Ma; I'd oughtn't t' a' spoke s' brash. But I got kind o' riled with Henery Pratt.

Of all th' mean spirited men-folks, I ever see, he's th' beatin'est. Ef you'll jes' sew a hook 'n' eye ont' this 'ere waist-ban', Ma, whilst I tack them gathers in place."

The old lady was rocking herself back and forth, her ancient nose in the air, her voice cracked and querulous with anger:

"I couldn't set s' much 's a hook 'n' eye t' a wais'-ban' t' suit *you*, Malviny; I don't know nothin' 'bout sewin', 'cordin' t' you. You can't trust me with nothin'. Soon's your back's turned I spile ev'rythin'. . . . I guess I won't do no more sewin' this side o' heaven."

"Now, Ma, don't take on!" her daughter exhorted her. "I got t' git this 'ere mornin' wrapper done, so's t' take it over t' Philury Pettibone this aft'noon. She'll pay me right off, 'n' then I c'n settle up with Obed Salter. I ain't never owed him sech a bill 's I do now. Jes' 's soon 's I c'n tack this 'ere shirrin' so 't wont git skewgeed I'll bile th' kettle 'n' make you a good hot cup o' tea."

"I don't want no tea," grumbled the old lady. "You al'ays seem t' think, Malviny, 'at you c'n pacify me—no matter how sassy you b'en—with a cup o' tea. That las' tea you got f'om Salter's ain't worth puttin' in th' pot. I'd 's soon drink hay-water."

Miss Bennett sighed as her skillful needle flew

in and out repairing the unthinking ravages of her surviving parent.

"I'll try 'n' git some nice green an' black mixed next time I go t' Boston," she promised vaguely.

". . . I seen a robin this mornin', Ma."

"Settin' still er flyin'?"

"Flyin'—right over towards th' pars'nage!"

"Ef you see 'em settin' still," pursued Mrs. Bennett, "or hoppin' on th' ground it's a 'nawful bad sign f'r th' whole year, Malviny."

"This one was flyin'—'way up high."

"But 't was goin' from you, Malviny," piped the old lady. "Yer luck was flyin' from you. Ef you'd only seen it comin' t'wards you now! I'm awful keerful not t' look f'r robins no more in th' spring o' th' year. But 't don't seem t' change m' luck."

"Now, Ma," protested Miss Malvina, "it really don't seem right f'r Christian folks t' take s' much stock in signs 'n' like that. Why, ef I was t' notice ev'ry little thing—th' way a pin lays on th' floor, when you pick it up; 'n' droppin' a dish-towel, er seein' th' moon over m' lef' shoulder, 'n' you know—I guess I'd go crazy. We're a-goin' t' hev good luck f'r all th' robins in town. I'll bet we git th' house painted up scrumtious this year, 'n' mebbe new leaders t' th' back door 'n' like's not a reg'lar bath-room, with a kur'sene heater, all

complete. How'd you like that, Ma? I ain't never felt better 'n I do this spring; I ain't had sca'cely a twinge o' rheumatiz all winter, 'n' I'm full o' spring an' ginger."

"Better knock on wood, Malviny," advised the old lady sourly. "You'll be flat on your back, first you know, all twisted up with rheumatiz."

Miss Bennett swiftly obeyed, her thimbled finger beating a smart rat-tat on the window-sill.

"I don't see what knockin' on wood c'n do t' pr'vent it," she murmured. "A body'd think th' was some spiteful person lurkin' an' list'nin' round, 'n' all ready t' pounce on a body ef they sh'd fergit. I wouldn't lay sech actions t' th' devil, t' say nothin' o' God."

"All I know is, ef folks don't knock on wood, when they git braggity, somethin's sure t' happen t' 'em," stated Mrs. Bennett positively. "I seen it over 'n' over agin. Why, I r'member th' winter your poor pa passed away. He was tellin' Deacon Scrimger how awful smart he was. 'Ain't had a sick time this winter,' s's he. 'You'd better knock on wood, Pa,' I says t' him. But he was feelin' contrary, like men-folks gen'ally do when th's other men-folks round, 'n' he pipes up 'n' says: 'I ain't a-goin' t' make a fool o' m'self no more that-a-way to please *you*, Ma.' Them was his very words. 'N' he set there solid on his cheer, like a

heathen idol. 'I won't do it, Ma,' s's he, real earnest. 'Well, Pa,' I says mournful, 'I'll do it f'r you; but I'm 'fraid 't won't help you none when you're took bad all of a suddent,' I says. 'Twas the very nex' day he took t' his bed. I knew th' wa'n't no hope f'om th' very first, so I picked out th' fun'ral hymns, an' I says t' Pa——"

"There, *that's* done!" interrupted her daughter in an aggressively cheerful tone. "Now I'm goin' t' whirl in 'n' git somepin' t' eat b'fore folks b'gins t' drop in; 'n' I wisht you'd step out 'n' look at th' sign right now, Ma, so you c'n act kind o' ca'm 'n' indiffer'nt. I d'clare I c'n feel that sign all through m' system, like a girl would her engagement ring. But I s'pose we'll git ust t' it, after a spell."

II

IT was five o'clock that same afternoon before Miss Bennett set forth, a flat parcel done up in newspaper containing Mrs. Pettibone's completed garment on her arm. Greatly to her surprise, no one had called to congratulate her on the new sign. Nobody, apparently, had so much as noticed it. Yet there it was, the one conspicuously new and fresh object on the weatherbeaten front of the little house: "Malvina Bennett, Dressmaker."

"'Tain't 's if them laylock bushes was in th' way," cogitated Miss Bennett. "A body can't help seein' it, whichever way they come. 'Tain't so t' say showy, 'n' like that; but it's neat an' it's got style to it, like my sewin'. I don't keer what anybody says t' th' contrary; but ef all my cust'mers was t' flock t' that critter over Trimmer's store for their spring suits—what with more 'n more o' 'em takin' t' ready-mades——"

Miss Bennett bit off the thread of her unhappy hypothesis like a length of thread.

"I'll bet it's a lot more unlucky t' harbor fears 'n' forebodin's 'n' t' fergit t' knock on wood," she

told herself resolutely. "Like enough Pa was skeered int' a fit o' sickness, ef all was knowed. But land! I'd ruther knock on wood t' m' dyin' day 'n hev Ma pick out m' fun'ral hymns premature."

She was still nerving herself to meet future adversity when she arrived at the parsonage gate.

"Ef I tell Philura—I mean Mis' Rev'ren' Pettibone—mebbe she c'n put me on th' right track," meditated the little dressmaker. "Th' don't seem t' be nothin' Philura can't git out th' surroundin' atmosphere. Now take that baby—Land! I hope it comes t' town all right. . . . Mebbe I'd better knock on wood."

No one answered her modest summons at the front door, and after a discreet pause she ventured a second pull at the old-fashioned bell-handle.

"I c'n hear it ring inside," she assured herself, as she listened with bent head; "'n' anyway, she wouldn't be goin' out now."

It was the minister himself who presently opened the door. Mr. Pettibone appeared pale, almost haggard, and his iron-gray hair stood up in wild confusion above his forehead. He stared uncomprehendingly at Miss Bennett.

"I come t' bring Mis' Pettibone's mornin' wrapper," she said timidly. "I b'en quite a spell gettin'

it all finished off; but here 'tis at last, 'n' I hope she'll like it."

She thrust the parcel into Mr. Pettibone's unwilling hand and turned to go away.

"Oh—er—Miss Malvina!"

Something in the minister's voice challenged attention. Miss Bennett paused tentatively on the doorstep.

"I—er—I'm sure Mrs. Pettibone would wish—in short, won't you step in for a moment?"

Miss Bennett obeyed; and the two stood facing each other in the semi-obscurity of the passage.

"I—er—possibly you have been aware——"

A sound from above stairs interrupted the minister's speech: a sound once heard never to be forgotten. It was the weak yet raucous protest of a human being newly introduced to this world of strife.

Miss Bennett clasped her hands in wordless emotion.

"It appears that my son prefers to announce himself," said Mr. Pettibone, with a queer shake in his voice.

"Fer th' land sake!" murmured Miss Bennett. "When did it come?"

"This morning, early; to be exact, at almost precisely seventeen minutes past four."

"An' Philura?—I mean Mis' Rev'ren' Pettibone? Is she——"

The minister cleared his throat; obviously he was listening with some uneasiness to the persistent sounds from above. They ceased suddenly, and he drew a relieved breath.

"Mrs. Pettibone is—I am pleased to tell you that she is——"

"'S well 's c'n be expected, I s'pose," inferred Miss Bennett, nodding her head sagely. "Th' ain't much more t' be said th' mornin' after."

She spoke with certain knowledge of that dread Valley of the Shadow, which her friend had lately traversed.

An expression of poignant recollection passed over the minister's pale face.

"That my wife is alive this morning," he said slowly, "and able to rejoice with me, albeit feebly, over the—er—happy event is a—a—matter—in short, a subject for——"

"I'll bet you're both glad it's over," broke in Miss Bennett. "I know I be; an' I guess th' hull parish 'll dror a long breath—what with her age 'n' all. I'll go now an' tell Miss Deaconess Buckthorn, 'n' she'll pass th' word t' Lecty Pratt; 'n' b' two o'clock ev'rybody in town 'll know."

Mr. Pettibone shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Ef I was you," pursued the spinster, "I'd muffle this 'ere door-bell, so 't she won't hear it janglin' when folks begins t' come t' inquire. An' don't you let nobody upstairs; I don't keer who they be, ner what they say. Some folks hes got about 's much sense 's hens."

The minister bowed his acknowledgments and murmured something about the doctor's orders.

"'N' ef you sh'd need me fer anythin', settin' up nights, er like that, jes' let me know. I'd admire t' do fer that baby. . . . Land! when I think o' Philura——"

She turned and went rather blindly down the steps and so out into the street, with a total forgetfulness of the paper parcel containing a blue morning wrapper, elaborately shirred and trimmed with cascades of white lace, the price of which was to have cancelled her growing obligations to Mr. Salter. When she did think of it, it was to picture to herself the new-made mother holding the infant in her arms.

"It 'll be jes' th' thing f'r her t' set up in," she told herself happily; "'n' t' think o' me workin' like all possess t' git it finished in time!"

III

MRS. BUCKTHORN was at home, her head tied up in red flannel, which lent an awful majesty to her aspect as she bade Miss Malvina be seated in close proximity to the kitchen stove.

"Got neu'ralgy, Mis' Buckthorn?" inquired the dressmaker, rolling her news like a sweet morsel under her tongue.

To herself she thought: "She ain't heared it yit, f'r all her party-wire."

Miss Bennett had not felt able to afford a telephone, a fact of which certain of her customers had taken mean advantage.

Mrs. Buckthorn heaved a vast, resounding sigh, which appeared to take its rise in the soles of her substantial shoes.

"It's more like new-ritis," she said. "You ain't never had that, Malvina, but the doctor says my nervous constitution is delicate—very delicate. . . . No; I know I don't look it; but it ain't always size an' heft 'at counts."

"Thank th' Lord it ain't!" said Miss Bennett.

"I don' know where I'd come in, ef it did. I ain't no bigger 'n a minute 'n' never expect t' be; but I c'n whirl in 'n' work equal t' th' best."

Mrs. Buckthorn eyed the dressmaker searchingly.

"Are you 's busy 's usual this spring, Malvina?" she inquired.

"Busier," quoth Miss Bennett stoutly.

She met Mrs. Buckthorn's inquisitorial gaze unflinchingly: "Land! I was sayin' t' Ma only this mornin', 'I'm so drove,' I says, 'I don't know but what I sh'll hev t' hire a girl.' Not 'at I like 'em 'round, clutterin' up th' shop 'n' settin' me ha'f crazy with doin' things wrong. 'Still,' I says, 'I got t' git this 'ere work out m' shop before th' summer sewin' comes in,' I says."

"I want t' know," syllabled Mrs. Buckthorn slowly. Then she smiled rather disagreeably, and moved her large shoulders.

The dressmaker's thin face reddened.

"I jes' took home a beautiful new dress t' Mis' Pettibone," she said defiantly.

"H'm-m," murmured Mrs. Buckthorn, adjusting the folds of red flannel above her brow. "I'm sur-prised t' hear you say so."

"You be? I'd like t' know why?"

"Fer one thing, I sh'd think under the cir-cumstances our pastor's wife would need t' prac-tice th'

strict-est economy. I hear she is expecting to employ a trained nurse—from Bos-ton."

Mrs. Buckthorn shook her head slowly:

"We all know our pastor's income, Malvina, an' we are a-ware that trained nurses from Boston cost thir-ty dollars a—week."

"I don't blame 'em none," contended Miss Bennett. "It's cheaper 'n a fun'ral."

"You sur-prise me, Malvina!"

"Well, mebbe I c'n s'prise you s' more. Mis' Rev'ren' Pettibone's baby hes come t' town with bells! It's a boy, an' he weighs nine pounds!"

Miss Malvina cast the final item of information in the balance with a lavish generosity which paid no heed to prosaic fact. "Might 's well say so," she privately excused herself. "Sounds healthy, 'n' anyway, I'll bet he'll weigh his nine pounds, sooner or later."

"Well, I d'clare!" gasped Mrs. Buckthorn. "*A—boy! an' nine pounds!*"

"Dressed," temporized Miss Bennett. "It's kind o' chilly weather, so they weighed him in his clo'es."

Mrs. Buckthorn's forehead, in so far as it could be viewed beneath the enshrouding flannel, appeared deeply corrugated.

"We have a telephone," she said coldly, "an' seein' th' Ladies' Aid 'n' Missionary S'ciety hes

lately installed one in th' parsonage f'r th' special use of the parish, 't would seem 's 'o' *I*, as pres'dent, should hev been th' first to be in-formed. But to hear it from *you*, Malvina, strikes me as exceedingly——"

"He was s' flabbergasted 'n' like that, he prob'ly didn't give you ner anybody a thought," interrupted Miss Bennett.

"Are you referring t' our pas-ter, Malvina?"

"Cert'nly I be. Prob'ly he didn't git a wink o' sleep all night, an' him bein' new t' th' job, too. Land! he looked like he'd b'en drored through a knot-hole backwards. Th' minute he opened th' door I see somethin' was up. But I didn't ast no questions, it bein' my endurin' rule not to, whatever I see er don't see in m' cust'mer's houses. Th's plenty o' folks 'at 'd be reg'lar gossips, havin' my 'xceptional op'tunities, s' t' say. But not *me*! 'No,' I says, 'I shet m' eyes 'n' m' years t' ev'rythin' 'xcept m' bizniz, an' *that's* makin' stylish clo'es, up-t'-date in ev'ry pertic'lar. An' I'll defy any woman in this 'ere town what's worn my sewin' t' show a hook that's come off b'fore its time, or a seam that's parted, 'xcept lawful on 'count o' customers bein' too fleshy—which nobody c'n lay t' *my* door, it bein' th' work of our Maker."

Miss Malvina paused for breath, and Mrs. Buckthorn, who had apparently been lost in

gloomy retrospection, again fixed a searching gaze upon her visitor.

"You tell me you did not display curiosity," she said. "Did Mis-ter Pettibone inform you of what had taken place?"

Miss Malvina chuckled:

"He done it himself," she replied. "Jes' squawked right out. You'd ought t' o' heard him. Guess he was hungry, fer he stopped all of a sudden like somebody corked him up with——"

"Malvina Bennett, do you mean t' tell *me* that *our pas-ter*——"

Miss Bennett stared uncomprehendingly for an instant; then she burst into cackling laughter, rocking herself back and forth and slapping her thin knees in an ecstasy of mirth.

"Fer pity sake, Mis' Buckthorn!" she exclaimed. "Your intellec' mus' be some affected b' your new-rights—er whatever 'tis 'at ails you. I meant th' *baby*, o' course! Tell you what! that baby's got good strong lungs; I bet he'll be heard from, right along."

Mrs. Buckthorn looked much offended.

"New-ritis," said she majestically, "affects th' nerves, *not* th' brain, Malvina. . . . No; don't go jus' yet; I have somethin' t' say t' you, first."

"I was only jokin', Mis' Buckthorn," apologized the little dressmaker, paling before the im-

placable expression on the large flaccid face under its coronet of dingy red flannel.

"You—an' I hope all that knows me—mus' recognize th' fact I never take any im-portant step in life, without first layin' th' matter b'fore th' throne of Grace," stated Mrs. Buckthorn, in the rotund voice she reserved for prayer-meeting, platform, and conjugal use.

"Uh-huh," assented Miss Malvina, seeming to grow smaller in her chair. "I know you're a nawful good woman, Mis' Buckthorn."

"I str-rive t' be," intoned that lady. "An' havin', as I have jus' told you, con-sidered th' matter, care-fully *an' pray'r-fully*, I have de-cided—feelin' it' t' be my Chr-istian dooty—to hence-forth employ the new dressmaker, whose name is Hobbs, I am told, though she pre-fers to be known as Madame Louise."

Miss Bennett was sitting up very straight now, a red spot in either thin cheek.

"What'd you say t' th' Lord, Mis' Buckthorn, when you laid th' matter o' givin' me th' go-by b'fore th' throne o' Grace, es you call it?"

"What did I say—— How dare you ask me such a wicked question, Malvina Bennett, an' you a perfessor in th' Presb'terian church?"

"Well, I'd like t' know jest how you put it up t' th' Lord," replied Miss Bennett composedly.

"I was thinkin', mebbe you laid it b'fore th' wrong throne. Folks is apt t' git things mixed once in a while, 'specially when they're s' much piouiser 'an other folks."

Mrs. Buckthorn appeared to struggle vainly for utterance; but the little dressmaker went on with a fine show of recklessness:

"Ef you wa'n't a reg'lar hyp'crit—which th's plenty o' folks in this town 'at I could name as thinks you be—you'd hev t' own up t' th' Lord 'at Malvina Bennett always made your clo'es honest an' strong, double stitchin' all th' seams, 'n' 's stylish 's was pos'ble, considerin' how fleshy you be; 'n'——"

"Malvina!" burst from the outraged Mrs. Buckthorn. "I refuse to lis-ten to you."

"Y' can't help lis'nin', Mis' Buckthorn," crowed Miss Bennett. "But I ain't a-goin' t' keep you from your new-rights fer long; I got plenty t' do in m' shop fer folks 'at 's jest 's pious 's you be an' a lot easier t' fit. I always thought I'd admire t' tell you jest what I thought; 'n' mebbe it 'll do you good t' think it over a spell after I'm gone. One thing you'd ought t' git spanked int' you is 'at *real* good folks ain't always blowin' their tin horns, th' way you be. 'N' they ain't so set up with their pray'r-meetin' manners 's t' be a nuisance t' their neighbors. Why, even my gray cat

'll turn tail an' run when she sees you a-comin' in th' yard, Mis' Buckthorn; an' childern 'll make themselves skurse ruther 'n meet you,—specially ef it's Sunday, an' they've been smellin' a flower er listenin' t' a bird singin' in th' trees."

Miss Bennett had risen from her chair and was backing toward the door, as she poured forth this fervid torrent of words. A joyous energy appeared to emanate from her small person; her faded eyes sparkled.

"Why, you ain't got th' faintest idee o' bein' a reg'lar Christian," she cried. "Even your Bible's got s' mixed with holy Buckthorn you don't know which 's which. . . . And that's about all—fer t' day. I sh'll admire t' see you bustin' out o' your plackets when that Hobbs woman gits through of you!"

Miss Bennett reached the street still scintillating with the joys of combat. But as she sped swiftly along under the budding maples, the spring wind blowing cold in her face, her spirits gradually fell.

"I guess I went an' made a nawful fool o' m'self," she reflected; "never once stoppin' t' think o' Deacon Buckthorn ownin' th' roof 'at covers us—an' me b'hind with m' rent, expectin' t' settle up with Mis' Buckthorn's spring dressmakin', es usual. Good land! What be I goin' t' do ef all

m' customers leaves me? Seems 's 'o' th' Lord wa'n't s' mindful of his own 's th' minister was tellin' las' Sunday. . . ."

She went two blocks out of her way to pass Trimmer's dry-goods store. Yes, there was her rival's resplendent sign in fresh gold letters on a black ground.

"Mad-am Loo-ise: Robes," repeated Miss Malvina aloud. "Huh! Sounds like a fun'ral d'rector. . . . Robes! Well, I'd like t' see th' way she finishes off a dress-waist inside. Ef I wa'n't 'fraid o' runnin' int' some o' her cust'mers, I'd jes' step up them stairs an' cast m' eye 'round. I'll bet I'd c'd tell inside o' two minutes what sort of a female Mis' Hobbs is 'n' what she c'n do in th' dressmakin' line."

She dallied with the glittering temptation to the point of crossing the street. Then, with one foot on the lower step of the steep staircase leading aloft, her courage failed her.

"I ain't got th' stren'th o' mind," she confessed weakly. "I guess ef I sh'd meet one o' m' reg'lar cust'mers up there I'd drop dead in a double duck-fit. Some other time, mebbe."

The sound of high-pitched voices engaged in earnest conversation on the upper landing lent wings to her feet for two blocks. Then quite out of breath she stopped to reason with herself.

"All th' fools ain't dead yit, Malvina Bennett," she told herself with a sniff of strong disdain. "Now, jest t' punish ye, you turn straight 'round 'n' march back t' that there woman's shop. You go up them stairs, an' you knock on her door. . . . What ye goin' t' say t' her when she comes t' th' door? Why, you're goin' to say you want t' see Mis' Hobbs; that'll take th' wind outen her sails, first off. Then you'll think o' somepin' t' say, I'll bet. You'll hev to. Th' ain't nobody goin' t' hurt you; 'n' ef you was t' meet cust'mers that ain't lady enough t' tell you they're tired o' th' styles in Arts 'n' Modes, when made up es I do it in my shop, *I* ain't th' one t' git red 'round th' years."

Communing thus masterfully with herself, Miss Malvina propelled her unwilling body back to the spot from which she had so lately beat a shamed retreat.

"Now, here you be, Malvina; now you g' on up them stairs. Bizniz is bizniz; don't you fergit that f'r a minute. You got t' know what you're up against; ef it ain't nothin' t' be skeered of you'll soon find it out. Ef it is, you got t' know that, too. But I'll be switched ef I'm a-goin' t' be skeered of a bogey in under th' bed, at *my* time o' life!"

The awe inspiring words "Madame Louise: Robes" were repeated in flourishing gold script

on the curtained glass door above. Miss Bennett paused to inspect them sternly:

"I s'pose George Trimmer done that much t' rent his rooms," she told herself. . . . "No; them han'some gold letters won't bite you, Malvina, ner they won't help her none, ef her sewin' ain't good."

But her trembling hand obstinately declined to aid and abet the bold project she had in mind.

"Be you tellin' me you're skeered t' knock on that there door, Malvina?" sneered Miss Bennett. "D' you s'pose th's a bo'-constrictor on th' other side—hay?—his chops all a-slaverin' an' ready t' swaller you hull? Well, ef th' is, you got t' pass that there door, all th' same. You hear me!"

She was spared a final effort of will by the sudden opening of the door in question. A buxom girl confronted her on the threshold with a quick stare of recognition. Behind the girl stood a tall, thin woman, her face twisted in an artificial smile.

IV

“WHY, Miss—Malvina!” stammered the girl. “I—I didn’t know——”

“Uh-huh,” confirmed the little dress-maker. “’Taint nobody else; ’n’ ’taint my ghost, neither.”

“If you’ll step into the reception parlor, madame,” simpered the tall woman, adjusting her frizzes, “I shall be at liberty, as soon as I’ve finished with a lady in the fitting department.”

Miss Bennett, her equanimity fully restored for some reason which she would have found it difficult to explain, stepped boldly past the round-eyed girl.

“Why, yes,” she said. “I shan’t mind settin’ a spell, whilst you’re finishin’ off that lady’s fittin’ in th’ d’partment you was speakin’ of.”

Her keen eyes were busy with the woman’s dress, noting a straining seam under one arm, the slanting sag of the skirt over the left hip and the way in which certain showy trimmings had been applied to the waist.

The maker of robes appeared in no haste. She

stood eyeing Miss Bennett's small person doubtfully.

"You'll find the latest fashion magazines on the stand," she said, indicating a speciously varnished table, littered with riotously colored presentments of long-limbed ladies.

"Thank you, Mis' Hobbs, but I'm pretty tolerable f'miliar with th' spring styles," returned Miss Bennett easily. "You're th' new dressmaker, I p'rsume?"

"I am Madame Louise—to the public," stated the tall lady.

"I want t' know!" chirped Miss Bennett. "Well, t' th' public, an' other folks too, I'm Miss Malvina. Mebbe you've heared o' me."

The tall lady shook her head. She was a stranger in Innisfield, she said, simpering and twisting her long neck to look sidewise at Miss Bennett, who continued to sway back and forth in a rocking-chair with great apparent enjoyment.

"Well," explained Miss Bennett, "I jest stopped in—I won't say friendly—but I thought I sh'd like t' look over some o' your sewin'. I don't keer ef it ain't more 'n ha'f finished off; all I want is t' cast my eye casual over what you call a robe."

"You would like to—to examine some of my work?"

"That's what I said, Louisa. I'd like t' look at th' inside o' one o' your dress-waists, 'n' take a squint at th' way you finish off your plackets 'n' like that, same 's if I was goin' t' have one o' them robes made up f'r m'self. You don't mind, I s'pose?"

"Why—no, I don't know as I have any objections to showing you an unfinished garment," hesitated the woman, "though your request is rather unusual; most ladies trust my taste and skill."

"You don't say!" commented Miss Bennett. "That don't strike me like good horse-sense, seein' no lady in Innisfield knows you. I sh'd think 't would be a reel good idee t' hev a sample robe t' show inquirers."

Madame Louise appeared curiously disconcerted by the suggestion. She murmured something incoherent which Miss Bennett dismissed with an airy gesture.

"G' on t' your cust'mer," she said briskly. "I shan't mind settin' f'r a spell. I got plenty t' think about."

Mrs. Hobbs scuttled hurriedly behind a dingy red hanging which afforded Miss Bennett a fleeting glimpse of a female figure in the familiar dishabille of the fitting-room.

"My gracious!" she murmured to herself. "Ef that ain't Mis' Obed Salter! Ef she sh'd

ketch me in here 'twould be all over town b' supper time." For an instant the little dressmaker meditated cowardly flight; then she stiffened herself resolutely.

"I don't care ef she does," she told herself. "Let th' hull of 'em talk! I'll tell Mis' Salter right out what I'm after, ef she asks *me*. I ain't a-goin' t' take no back seat in this 'ere town. Any-way, it'll be cheap advertisin'."

Pleased with this conceit, Miss Malvina continued to sway placidly back and forth, her ears brazenly alert for scraps of the conversation which floated out from the curtained seclusion of the fitting-room.

"Do you think I need any paddin' in under m' left shoulder-blade?" inquired Mrs. Salter's thin nasal voice. "I gen'ally hev' some right there where m' chest 's kind o' caved in. I ain't had no lung t' speak of on that side f'r years an' years. The doctor says I'm a livin' miracle."

Madame Louise's reply was inaudible. And Mrs. Salter presently went on:

"I've had most o' m' suits made up by a dress-maker here in town. But she hain't no more idee o' *style*!"

Miss Malvina's thin face crimsoned with indignation; she leaned forward eagerly in her chair to hear Mrs. Hobb's comment to the effect that

country dressmakers were generally lacking in style.

"We're s' glad an' thankful you come t' Innisfield," pursued Mrs. Salter soulfully. "How'd it happen?"

"What—me comin' here?" inquired Mrs. Hobbs, whose utterance indicated a mouthful of pins. "Well, 'course I wouldn't mention it t' everybody, m—m—m, but I've seen better days, Mis' Salter, m—m—m. Time was when I had my own m—m—m cos-tumes im-ported from Paris."

"Fer th' land sake!" ejaculated Mrs. Salter, "from—Paris! I want t' know."

"But I always had *such* taste, so when my dear husban'—— If you'll jus' turn 'round a little; that's right. . . . Now I guess we're through for to-day. . . . No; don't come t'-morrow. The's a lot o' ladies coming in t'-morrow; but the day after. . . . No; I'm sorry but I really couldn't promise, Mis' Salter. I'm s' rushed."

A pause, filled with active rustlings from within presaged Mrs. Salter's advent into the outer room, where sat Miss Bennett, her features composed to a strong calm.

"Well, I never!" faltered the wife of the grocer, her lavender-tinted complexion becoming curiously spotted with red.

"You seem s'rprised t' see me, Mis' Salter," commented Miss Bennett.

"Why, I—— You c'd knock me down with a feather!" panted Mrs. Salter.

"I d'clare, ain't that funny! Well, es it happens, I got bizniz with Louisa, same's you have."

Miss Malvina turned to the proprietor of the new establishment with a dignity which appeared to propel Mrs. Obed Salter out of the door and down the stairs, though quite against that lady's will.

"Now," she said, addressing the puzzled Mrs. Hobbs, "I'll jest take a look at the suit you're makin' up fer Mis' Obed Salter. It 'll be 's good 's another s' fur 's I'm concerned."

Mrs. Hobbs sat down rather suddenly.

"I ain't ust' to standing," she explained. "These long fittings tire me something fierce."

Miss Bennett nodded sagaciously.

"Guess you ain't bin long in th' bizniz," she inferred.

"No; not so long," acknowledged Mrs. Hobbs. "But then, I always had such a lot of taste," she added.

"The's plenty o' folks c'n brag o' taste 'at can't fell a seam t' save their necks f'om th' gallows," commented Miss Bennett darkly.

She continued to gaze at her rival, who blinked uneasily as if under a searchlight.

"If you was wanting a dress made," offered Mrs. Hobbs, "I guess I can't 'commodate you—not f'r a month, anyway. I guess I took in too much, as it is—an' all of 'em hurrying me," she added fretfully.

"Huh!" ejaculated Miss Bennett. "Mebbe they won't pester ye no more after th' first dress you make up for 'em."

"That's what I'm afraid of," murmured Mrs. Hobbs unexpectedly.

Quite unexpectedly too, she began to dab at her purplish lids with a dingy handkerchief.

"I never supposed—I hadn't an idea——" she said, and broke off with an obvious effort. "I sat up till one o'clock last night and the night before trying to—to finish some dresses. But——"

"Fer goodness sake why don't you git in some help?" demanded Miss Bennett. "You don't look to me like you hed th' gumption t' whirl in an' really sew."

"I've got lots of taste an'—an' style," almost whimpered Mrs. Hobbs. "But I'm s' nervous—an' when they all take to hurrying me——"

Miss Bennett arose with a gesture of large renunciation.

"I guess I must be goin' along," she said. "I

got a few things t' do m'self. But thank th' Lord I ain't nervous an' never was! Ef a body knows how t' handle their job an' gits busy doin' it they won't hev no time t' tend their nerves. I'm reel glad I come t' see you, Mis' Hobbs."

Mrs. Hobbs followed her visitor's quick, bird-like movements with lackluster eyes.

"You was speaking of my getting in somebody to—to help," she said doubtfully. "Do you—could you tell me of anybody?"

Miss Bennett stopped short, as if forcibly arrested by the other woman's question.

"How much would you pay?" she asked, in a queer, half-stifled voice. "F'r a reel dressmaker, I mean. One 'at knows their bizniz from a t' izzard an' ain't afraid t' whirl in an' work. The's a friend o' mine—I might git t'—t' help you out f'r a spell, mebbe."

Miss Bennett felt herself deeply humiliated by the suggestion she had allowed to escape her. That she, Malvina Bennett, who had run her own shop for years and years should be reduced to begging for work by the day. It was unbelievable! It was dreadful! And yet there were the three insistent specters of rent, fuel, and food which had haunted her night and day through weeks of comparative idleness. And there was Ma!

"Ef I c'd only hold on till fall," she was telling herself, when Mrs. Hobbs broke in eagerly:

"Send your friend around the first thing in the morning. I'd be only too pleased to pay her two dollars n' a ha'f a day, if she's what you say."

Miss Malvina was silent, her eyes fastened blindly upon the door knob clutched tight in the grip of her slippery cotton glove. She could feel her ears burn crimson under Mrs. Hobbs' watery gaze.

"Three times six is eighteen," computed Mrs. Hobbs. "Yes; I d'clare I'd make it three a-day—f'r a while, anyway. I jus' got t' do something—'r go raving crazy!"

Miss Malvina hastily swallowed the round, hard lump which had risen in her throat.

"Well, I'll tell you, Mis' Hobbs," she hesitated. "I spoke kind o' hasty. My friend—her 't I was speakin' of—wouldn't hear t' goin' out b' th' day. . . . 'N' I don't b'lieve she'd—even come to your shop t' see you, neither. But ef I—ef I was t' fetch the work home t' her—evenin's, when I ain't busy m'self—I'll bet she'd do some a-number-one work fer you. *She c'n sew!* . . . What d' ye say t'—t' tryin' her, on a dress-waist, er like that? Ef you don't like her work, 't won't cost you a red cent. Ef you do, it'll be three dollars a-day, same 's you said, 'n' reg'lar hours."

Mrs. Hobbs gripped her visitor's arm.

"Come in m' work-room—jus' for a minute," she urged.

Once behind the breastworks of Mrs. Hobbs' establishment Miss Malvina gasped with the wonder of what she beheld: chairs, tables, even the floor bore evidence of overwhelming success in the shape of inchoate garments of every description. A couple of headless figures, purporting to counterfeit the female form divine, exhibited the more finished products of Mrs. Hobbs' genius, while a soiled teacup, a dispirited dab of butter, and a broken loaf shared the table with a lavish supply of spools, buttons, and parti-colored trimmings.

"Fer th' land sake!" cried Miss Malvina, rolling up her eyes to an unjust heaven. "The's work enough here f'r a dozen dressmakers a-workin' day an' night f'r a month. What on airth did you take it all in for?"

Mrs. Hobbs gazed about her with a sort of mournful pride.

"The ladies kep' a-coming," she said, "an' I hardly knew where to draw the line. But I haven't sat down to a regular meal since the first day I came."

Miss Malvina sealed up her complex emotions with a prolonged sniff.

"I might 's well take a dress-waist now," she remarked. "Which 'll it be?"

Mrs. Hobbs reflected, her frizzled head supported on one dingy hand.

"Well," said she, "I hardly know where to begin. There's a Mrs. Bucksmith—no; that ain't the name, either; I'll look it up in m' book. She's a large lady, an' she says she wants her dress for divine worship nex' Sunday. That's it on the figure there. I'm making up a costume for her daughter, too."

"Uh—huh," Miss Malvina permitted herself to utter. Then she sniffed again. "Do you mean t' tell me that there brown an' purple is for Mis' Buckthorn?—I s'pose that's what you call a *robe*."

"Stylish! ain't it?" said Mrs. Hobbs. "I copied it right off a fashion plate—the very latest from Sher Par-ee."

"Huh?"

"Paris—we call it on this side the water," condescended Mrs. Hobbs. "If you c'd take that an'—an' persuade your friend to finish it off."

"All right," said Miss Malvina briefly. "I'll take it along right now."

Under cover of the gathering dusk she hurried homeward, the large flat parcel containing Mrs. Buckthorn's brown and purple robe under her arm.

"I ain't a-goin' t' let Ma starve," she told herself defiantly. "I'll finish 'em off honest. But land! what a set o' scarecrows 'll be comin' out t' church bimeby. I sh'll admire t' see 'em settin' in th' pews."

V

AT her own door Miss Malvina paused. How was she to explain the flat parcel and its alien contents to Ma?

"Never cross a bridge tell you git t' it," she muttered, and moved cautiously around to the back door with the unformulated idea of concealing Mrs. Buckthorn's Parisian costume in the wash-boiler till Ma should be safely in bed.

To her surprise the door of the kitchen stood wide open, admitting the freakish April wind in furious gusts.

"Why, Ma Bennett!" began Miss Malvina rebukingly. "Ef you don't ketch a nawful cold—with all this fresh air in th' house."

Then she saw that the kitchen fire was almost out and fell to mending it vigorously.

"I guess Ma jes' stepped over t' one o' th' neighbors," she assured herself. "An' th' wind blowed th' door open."

Mrs. Bennett herself confirmed this hypothesis a moment later. "I b'en in next door," she announced, as she dropped the heavy woolen shawl from her shoulders.

"It's awful fresh here, Ma," cautioned her daughter. "I found th' back door wide open."

Mrs. Bennett sneezed three times in rapid succession.

"I guess I ketched m' death all right," she said complacently. "Where you b'en, Malviny?"

"Me? Oh, I b'en down town 'n' round. . . . I got some grand news f'r you, Ma!"

"Huh?"

"Philura Pettibone's got a baby, Ma! Come t' town this mornin'. A boy, an' he weighs ten pounds!"

"Born on a Friday," commented the old lady. "An' a minister's son, at that!"

"That ain't a-goin' t' hurt him none!" contended Miss Bennett, glancing sidewise at the incriminating parcel which she had neglected to conceal. "Ain't you glad, Ma? I'm tickled most t' pieces. T' think o' Philura—at her age, with a real baby all her own!"

Mrs. Bennett was not listening. She moved stiffly across the floor.

"Come here, Malviny," she bade her daughter. "Look a' there, will you!"

Miss Bennett peered through the small-paned window in obedience to her mother's pointing finger.

"I d'clare, looks like th' was a light next door,"

she said. "The' is! Land! I ain't seen a light over there f'r—I' me see——"

"It'll be two years, come June," wheezed Mrs. Bennett. "They moved in this aft'noon, jes' after you went downtown. I was settin' b' th' kitchen window an' I seen 'em come. *Now* I guess you're sorry you went off an' stayed two hours. Yes, you did, Malviny, two hours b' th' clock, an' me here all b' myself. No thanks t' you 'at I ain't dropped dead in m' tracks, Malviny Bennett, with you off p'radin' th' streets, like you was sixteen."

"Now, Ma, don't take on," pleaded the little dressmaker. "I—I was kep'. I won't do it ag'in. . . . Who's moved int' Philura Rice's house, Ma? I d'clare I thought nobody 'd ever live there agin; it's s' kind o' gloomy with all them trees in th' yard an' th' ol' rose bushes an' syringas growed mos' t' th' secon' story windows."

"You couldn't guess ef you was t' try a year," crowed Mrs. Bennett. Then she lowered her voice to an incriminating whisper: "They're fur'ners; an' what's more, I'll bet anythin' they're Cath'lics!"

Miss Malvina had gathered her cloak and with it the unfinished costume, imperfectly concealed beneath its scant folds.

"What you got done up in that newspaper s' keerful, Malviny?" demanded the old lady, suddenly alert.

"Did you find out the name o' them strange folks, Ma, an' where they come from?" parried her daughter. "An' how d' you happen t' git acquainted s' suddin'?"

"Oh, the girl come over t' borry a pitcher o' drinkin' water, 'n' I went over t' show her how t' start the pump. . . . What's in your newspaper bundle, Malviny?"

Miss Bennett hastily reconsidered her previous resolve.

"I guess I may 's well tell you," she murmured resignedly. "This 'ere is a cos-tume f'r Mis' Deaconess Buckthorn. I brought it home t'—t' finish off—b' day's work. . . . I'm al'ays glad t' 'commodate."

"Yes, I know you be," agreed the old lady mordantly. "Well, ef Mis' Deaconess Buckthorn's took t' doin' her own dressmakin', all I got t' say is it's about the most onchristian act—with us a-dependin' on sewin' f'r th' vit'uls we put in our mouths. . . . The's somebody a-knockin' at th' front door, Malviny."

Miss Bennett caught up the kerosene lamp from the table. "Mebbe it's somebody come t' look over th' fashion plates," she said hopefully. "You

set th' kettle over, Ma, 'n' put that johnny cake in th' oven t' warm. 'S soon 's we've et, I got t' whirl in an' finish that cos-tume f'r Mis' Buckthorn. She's got her mind made up t' wear it Sunday mornin' t' what she calls d'vine service, though goodness knows why."

Against the dim background of swaying trees the open front door revealed a small, frightened face, and Miss Bennett became hazily aware of wide dark eyes, a tumbled mass of curls, and the scarlet curve of parted lips.

"You pardon, *madame*," began the unexpected visitor, "but my fat'er—he ees become sick, of a sudden. Could you—of your kin'ness, *chère madame*—tell me of a *docteur*?"

"Well, I want t' know!" ejaculated Miss Malvina, shielding the wind-blown lamp with the crook of her elbow. "Are you the strange girl jest moved in nex' door? Walk right in; do!"

"One t'ousand t'anks, *madame*; but it ees impossible. My fat'er suffer——"

"Jest you wait a minute till I go 'n' tell Ma 'n' I'll run over with you," volunteered Miss Bennett eagerly. "Guess I'd better stop long enough t' ketch up a shawl 'count of m' neuralgy."

But the girl had disappeared when Malvina, shawled against the wind, finally returned after appeasing the curiosity of Ma. The little dress-

maker made her way through a gap in the ancient hedge which separated the two yards, and finding the side door of the old Rice house ajar, walked boldly in. By the wavering light of a candle which merely served to accentuate the gloom, she beheld a dense clutter of bales, boxes, and the stark outlines of crated furniture; and in an arm-chair drawn close to an open window the huddled figure of a man. He was groaning loudly, monotonously, while the girl besought him to drink from the cup she was holding to his lips.

"Well, f'r goodness sake!" commented Miss Malvina. "Ain't this a pretty kettle o' fish!—your pa sick, an' not a bed t' put him in. . . . Say, what you givin' him in that cup? Some good hot J'maica jinger, er a dose of Perry Davis' Pain-Killer 'll generally stop th' gripes—ef that's what ails him. . . . Got any hot water?"

The girl shook her head.

"Ze fire—eet will not burn. I give heem wine; but he refuse, as you see."

Miss Malvina considered, her head on one side like a sagacious sparrow.

"Well," she said, "first off, I'll dash over t' Lecty Pratt's—she's got a phone—an' call up th' doctor. Course ef 't was Ma, er me, I'd take Perry Davis; but I don't know nothin' 'bout your pa's constitution. . . . I'll be back in two jerks of a

lamb's tail an' kindle a fire in th' kitchen stove. We got t' hev hot water, anyhow."

The doctor, a big, gruff man, arrived in a snorting little automobile before Miss Malvina had succeeded in starting a reluctant flame in the long unused stove.

"No wonder it won't dror!" muttered Miss Malvina indignantly. "Jes' look at that there stove-pipe—fairly et up with rust! I'll go over an' git m' oil stove."

Doctor North stared thoughtfully at Miss Malvina over the rim of his spectacles, as if the sight of the little dressmaker, her second-best black hair front pushed rakishly to one side, was a new and surprising one. He had already jammed his hat well over his eyes and was drawing on his gloves.

Miss Malvina was familiar with this wordless verdict—as were most Innisfield folks, to whom the good doctor stood as a merciful arbiter of fate between the here, the heretofore, and the hereafter.

"Then he ain't dangerous," she inferred.

"He's hungry and done up with moving," growled the doctor. "Neither of 'em have eaten a bite since morning. Get him some hot tea and a boiled egg—soft, mind you—and a good thick slice of bread and butter. Then put him to bed

with a hot brick at his feet. He'll be all right in the morning."

Miss Malvina cast a hasty glance about the mouldy old kitchen.

"Whatever possess 'em t' light down here?" she projected after the doctor's retreating back. "Seems 's 'o th' more fur'n folks are the less sense they got. Th' simple idee o' takin' on like that over an empty stomick!"

But it was not without strenuous and manifold exertions that Miss Malvina succeeded in carrying out Doctor North's simple prescription. There was bread in the house, it appeared, a queer long crusty loaf. "All rind an' no bread," pronounced the little dressmaker disapprovingly. Two eggs, a pinch of tea, and an infinitesimal pat of salty butter she abstracted from her own dwindling stores, to the tune of Ma Bennett's reproaches.

"You're more 'n welcome," she told the girl warmly. "We shan't never miss that drorin' o' tea, ner th' eggs, neither; our hen laid 'em."

But the invalid opposed a fretful torrent of French to the weak decoction of green tea Miss Bennett presently offered him.

"I guess he'll make out," was her well-founded opinion, "ef he c'n gabble that-a-way. Is he sayin' anythin' p'tic'lar? Now, you git this 'ere egg down him, ef you kin. Then set down an' swal-

ler a bite yourself—er first thing we know, we'll hev you keeled up."

The girl looked sweetly puzzled.

"I know not w'at is 'keeled'," she said, "but first I mus' prepare ze *vin brûlé*; eet ees zat my fat'er reques'—not being accustom to drink *thé vert*—but t'anking you one *mille* time, *chère madame*."

"I said you was more 'n welcome, bein' neighbors, though fur'n," chirped the little dressmaker. "But I ain't what you might call a madam—not bein' a married woman, nor yet wantin' t' be. So I'll trouble you t' call me *Miss Malvina Bennett*. . . . I s'pose you know it's downright wicked t' put th' bottle t' y'r neighbor's lips—let alone your pa's," she added sternly, as the girl set a basin of wine over the oil burner. "I guess we 'll hev t' git a white ribbin pinned ont' you. . . . Mebbe it's a leadin' o' Providence you come to dwell in our midst."

The girl, understanding merely that some sort of introduction had been offered, showed the edges of her white teeth in a shy smile.

"My fat'er ees too ill for polite," she said gently; "but you will permit me to acquaint to you *mon père*, M'sieu' Etienne Desaye, Mees—Mees——"

"Malvina Bennett," supplied the Good Samar-

itan, all at once aware of her false front, which had slid down over one ear, revealing a mass of curling white hair, wind blown into a maze of glistening silver. "I guess I look like a fright," she added, as the man's dark eyes suddenly fastened themselves upon her.

He had struggled to his feet, and was bowing low. Then, before she had become aware of his further intent, he had taken her hand in both his own and raised it to his lips, murmuring broken words of gratitude.

"Me, my name is Madeleine," the girl offered, with a quaint little curtsy. "I 'ave mos' g-reat 'appiness to know you, Mees Malvina."

"My stars!" gasped the astounded Miss Bennett, "I guess it's high time your pa was got t' bed, b'fore he gits t' ravin'. I'll jes' run over home an' fetch a hot brick, like the doctor said."

She was glad to hide her agitation in the friendly darkness outside.

"T' think o' that fur'n man actooally a-kissin' my hand," she said to herself as she slipped through the hedge. "I never heard o' sech a thing! . . . I wouldn't das t' tell Ma! An' him a-suppin' down hot wine, like 't was a cup o' tea. I guess you see your duty cut out f'r you, Malvina Bennett. Mebbe you'll find you c'n exert an influence 's well 's other folks—more 'special when

th' op'tunity's plumped right down in your side-yard, so t' say."

It was a singularly flushed and complacent Miss Malvina who finally sat down to a belated repast of dry corn-bread and boiled tea. Ma Bennett, it appeared, felt herself justified in displaying a large assortment of injured feelings.

"I got sech a nawful sinkin' at th' pit o' my stumick," she complained, "I can't eat—'n' all from waitin' on you, Malviny."

"Swaller down some hot tea, first off, Ma," advised her daughter; "it'll chirk you up. That was jes' what ailed *him*; but he wouldn't drink his tea, after I fixed it all nice f'r him with milk an' sugar. An' you'd ought t' 'a' heared the heathen lingo he got off! But *she* said he wanted hot wine. Did you ever?"

"Ef Mis' Deaconess Buckthorn was t' hear tell o' that she'd take him in a blue pledge card t' sign," said Ma. "They're gittin' all they can t' trim up th' church Tem'rance Sunday."

"Looks reel tasty, too, all them blue an' red cards strung up on yellow cord," allowed her daughter. "But I ain't a-goin' t' hev Mis' Buckthorn buttin' in on this job. I've took it upon myself, Ma. . . . An' don't you tell nobody what I said, Ma. I'm reel earnest t' do some work f'r th' Lord. Mebbe I c'd git a star er two in my

crown that-a-way; an' cordin' t' her own tell, Mis' Buckthorn 'll be s' trimmed up with 'em she'll beat th' 'Postle Paul. . . . Now, ef you'll rense up these few dishes, Ma, I'll whirl in an' sew 's hard 's I kin till midnight. I want t' git an hour in th' mornin' t' help them folks nex' door git settled. I don't b'lieve that house 's hed a broom laid to it in two years."

"Oh, yes, 't has, Malviny," contradicted the old lady. "First thing I see was Deacon Scrimger—I guess he had th' rentin' of it—he come along in his wagon an' hitched, 'long about two o'clock. I seen him go in th' front door. After a spell he carries out three kitchen cheers an' a lookin'-glass, 'n' like that, an' puts 'em in his wagon. I s'pose likely they was left in th' house when Philura Rice moved over t' th' parsonage after she married the minister. Anyhow, he kep' a-bringin' out ol' broken stuff till th' was quite a wagon-load. 'N' after that I seen him take a broom 'n' dus'-pan——"

Mrs. Bennett interrupted the flow of her remarks to carry the milk pitcher to the pantry. When she returned her daughter was surveying the unfinished costume she had removed from its wrappings and spread upon a chair. Poignant dismay was depicted upon Miss Malvina's small, anxious face.

"Did y' ever see th' like o' that?" she was say-

ing to herself. "Not one o' them seams bound—n'r even overcast; 'n' you c'n see where it's pretty nigh busted out a'ready in the back o' th' arm-sizes, jes' from tryin' on. When you think o' th' way Mis' Buckthorn leans forward on the pew-back durin' th' long prayer it's easy t' see what'd happen. My land! ef ever I see a dress throwed together—'n' that there madam calls it *a robe!*"

"Malviny Bennett," shrilled the old lady excitedly, "where 'd you git that dress?"

"It was give t' me t' finish off, Ma," said Miss Malvina, realizing the maternal presence too late. "I'm goin' t' git good money f'r doin' it, paid right down in my fist. But I don't know what t' do about them seams. They won't last out one wearin'. . . . Be keerful, Ma, I don't know es it 'll stan' much handlin'."

The old lady, her thin lips puckered into a sagacious knot, was peering at the creation of Mrs. Hobbs' genius.

"Do you mean t' tell me, Malviny Bennett, that Mis' Deaconess Buckthorn done that? An' that she give it t' you t' finish off?"

"I ain't goin' t' tell you nothin'," said Miss Malvina with a fine show of firmness. "'Tain't none of our bizniz who done it, Ma. All I know is I've got t' put my hand t' th' plough an' do somethin' t' keep that dress-waist from bustin' out

in church disgraceful. Tell you what, I'm goin' t' tape them arm-sizes an' double stitch 'em. An angel f'om heaven couldn't do no more."

The loud whir of Miss Malvina's sewing-machine drowned a highly colored description of her childhood, going back to the notable day when Ma Bennett had seen her duty and done it, to the extent of snipping her daughter's youthful tongue with a pair of sharp scissors "f'r tellin' a wicked lie."

Miss Malvina had carefully laid side her second best false front and her abundant white hair curled recklessly over her small head as she ripped and snipped and stitched, being careful to preserve the astonishing *ensemble* of the purple and brown costume.

"It's enough t' make a cat laugh," she muttered to herself, when at midnight the striped tabby awoke to stretch her pink jaws to their widest and blink sleepily at the finished work Miss Malvina was folding away.

"I done an honest half day b' th' clock," the little dressmaker was telling herself, as she crept wearily up to bed. "'N' that'll give me time t' do f'r them—ef they'll let me."

She paused in the act of drawing down her blind to gaze at the house across the hedge, and thrilled at sight of a feeble gleam of light in one

of the second story windows of Philura Pettibone's old house.

"It seems kind o' nice 'n' cheerful t' hev folks livin' over there agin," she murmured, "even ef they be fur'n. . . . An' t' think o' *him* a-kissin' my han'—like I was a queen in a hist'ry book."

VI

MRS. SILAS PETTIBONE'S baby, though as yet blissfully ignorant of the fact, was quite as much in the Innisfield public eye as Woodrow Wilson or the Duchess of Marlborough. Indeed, for the first weeks of his life he might be said to outstrip either of the aforementioned personages in the interest and excitement he stirred up.

As Miss Malvina Bennett had foreseen, no sooner had the news of his arrival percolated through the village telephone system—a process materially assisted in its onward course by the prevalent party-wire—than the shrill door-bell of the parsonage began to announce numerous visitors from every quarter of the parish. It was almost as thrilling as election day or a church fair. Old neighbors met at the gate or on the minister's front porch and paused to exchange spicy reminiscences of the past, mingled with comments and prophecies concerning the new baby, whom the female portion of the community were privileged to look upon,

as he reposed in his old-fashioned cradle in the parsonage "spare room."

The trained nurse from Boston, in her white uniform and stiffly starched cap, opposed an equally stiff resistance to the tide of parochial curiosity which sought to overflow into the chamber beyond, where lay the baby's mother.

But when Mrs. Deaconess Buckthorn, happily recovered from her late attack of neuritis, mounted the stairs, it was felt that all barriers must fall.

"I shall see our paster's wife, of course," she had announced to a ring of attendant satellites who followed her progress with eager interest. "As president of our Ladies' Aid and Mission-ary So-ciety it is my priv'lege, an' as the Sab-bath School teacher of Philura Rice it is my sacred right.'

Providentially, or otherwise, the nurse from Boston had descended to the kitchen, where Mrs. Wessells was thoughtfully absorbing a cup of tea in an effort to 'keep up her stren'th 'till she could rub off a few pieces' of the weekly ironing; therefore no stiffly starched presence opposed Mrs. Buckthorn's dignified progress as she sailed past the open door of the room where the baby—still unconscious of the greatness thrust upon him—was holding court.

Mrs. Pettibone, looking very small and weak, as she reposed among her white pillows, opened her eyes with a start upon the large, somber figure standing at the foot of her bed. Mrs. Buckthorn was gazing down at her with the dubious mixture of curiosity and resignation the minister's wife had noticed at uncounted funerals, when the wearer of that large fortress-like bonnet bristling with time-defying feathers, advanced to "view the remains." She gasped a little and glanced about rather wildly for the soothing white linen presence, which she remembered had left the room only a moment before in quest of gruel.

"Well, Phi-lura," intoned Mrs. Buckthorn. "I have seen your ba-by an' I felt I could not leave the pars'nage without a word with you. . . . You are lookin' as well 's c'n be expected. How do you *feel*?"

Mrs. Pettibone reflected vaguely. She had not thought much about her feelings since the baby came. It was enough to lie quiet and happy in the still room, and at intervals find the baby's downy little head and questing mouth against her breast. She smiled.

"I am—I think I feel very—well—thank you."

"Let me see," pursued Mrs. Buckthorn strongly. "The ba-by is a week old, I be-lieve?"

"A week—to-morrow," corrected the baby's mother.

"When my M'ree Is'bel was a week old I sat up in a straight-backed chair an' read my Bi-ble f'r an hour," stated Mrs. Buckthorn. "An' that same day I done the family mendin', th' Lord helpin' me, Deacon Buckthorn's socks an' th' boys' knee-pants 'n' all. The day after *that* I was out in th' kitchen attendin' t' my house-hold dooties, es usual. *I* never indulged fleshly lusts b' remainin' in bed t' be waited on by a nurse from Bos-ton."

Mrs. Pettibone trembled visibly and sought for her handkerchief. She was still very weak.

"I suppose you know Louisa Wessells is camped down in your kitchen, doin' th' house-work reg'lar b' th' day," pursued her visitor inexorably. "B'sides that woman drest in white that spen's all her time a-waitin' on you. . . . It mus' be a nawful expense t' our paster; but p'rhaps you haven't thought of that. . . . How much do you pay your trained nurse b' th' week, Phi-lura?"

Mrs. Pettibone gazed piteously past her inquisitor. She was sure she heard the baby crying. She raised herself on one elbow the better to listen.

"'Twon't hurt him none t' cry," said Mrs. Buckthorn. "I guess th' ladies 's been weighin'

him. I *hope* you an' Mr. Pettibone wa'n't party to it, Phi-lura, but Malvina Bennett's b'en a-tellin' all over this town that the ba-by weighed *nine pounds* when he was born. It's a nawful thing, Philura, fer an im-mortal soul t' start out on its journey through this vale of tears with a wicked lie 'round its neck. If you or our paster knew—an' you must 'a' known—he weighed only six 'n' a quarter, with all his clo'es on—it was your dooty——”

“He's been gainin’,” broke in Mrs. Pettibone eagerly. “Miss Sedgewick weighed him this morning, and she said——”

Mrs. Buckthorn wagged her feathers ominously.

“I'm afraid *not*, Phi-lura. Your child looks very feeble t' *me*. Nothin' like mine at the same age. An' th's others thinks so, too. . . . You'd ought t' be prepared t' bow your neck submissive t' th' Lord's will, Phi-lura.”

“I am,” declared Mrs. Pettibone. “Didn't God give me that baby?”

A delicate crimson had begun to burn in her thin cheeks; her blue eyes under their childish brows gazed up defiantly at Mrs. Buckthorn's granite front.

“Take care, Phi-lura!” warned that lady in a hollow voice. “Your idees on sacred subjec's is

gettin' t' be pretty well known in this 'ere community. I'm sure I don't know what we're a-comin' to when our paster's wife sets herself up as understandin' th' ways of the Almighty better 'an the creeds."

"I'm thankful God's ways are better than the creeds," willfully misconstrued the small lady from amongst her pillows.

"What did you *say*, Phi-lura?" demanded Mrs. Buckthorn sternly. "Would you be willin' t' repeat that, a-standin' up amongst the goats b'fore th' great white throne? Answer me!"

But Mrs. Pettibone, harassed by the mingled sounds of her visitor's nasal tones and the continued wailing of the baby, seemed incapable of a reply. She began to cry instead.

"I see that an awakened conscience is doin' its bles-sed work in your heart, Phi-lura," pursued her tormentor. "Don't hender it! . . . An' that r'minds me, I fail t' see your Bi-ble anywheres about. I thought, of course, I sh'd find it right t' han' in *this* house. I sh'd love t' read a few words from th' Psa'ms an' engage in prayer before I leave. You need it."

In pursuance of this pious project Mrs. Buckthorn began rummaging busily among the various articles on Mrs. Pettibone's bureau.

"Huh! a nursin'-bottle! I thought you'd have

t' come t' it—at your age. . . . Well, I declare! I guess very few of us 'd think we c'd afford a large flask of cologne—with the world in need, as never b'fore. . . . Whis-key—as sure as I live! What does *this* mean in th' home of our paster? My! my! What a terrible example t' set b'fore th' youth of our community! . . . I shall cert'nly speak my mind t' Mis-ter Pettibone before I leave this house. . . . An' still I find no Bi-ble. . . . But perhaps your nurse from Boston has concealed it in one of th' bureau-drawers. . . . What a sad story I shall have t' tell if I cannot find that b-lessed book—— Well, I mus' say I *am* sur-prised *an'* grieved, Phi-lura. Extravagance an' display are surely out of place in th' pars'nage—if nowhere else. . . . Comfort an' cleanliness do *not* call for embroidery ner lace, such as I see on these 'ere garments—an' still no Bi-ble! But I do find here 'Holt on the Care an' Feedin' of Infants.' Is *this* a proper substitute for your Bi-ble, Phi-lura?"

Mrs. Pettibone had hidden her face in her pillow. She was thinking confusedly that she must not listen to what Mrs. Buckthorn was saying; that she must be calm—quite calm and tranquil, otherwise the baby might have the colic. Miss Sedgewick had said so, and Miss Sedgewick knew.

Mrs. Buckthorn had carried on her pious quest as far as the wash-stand, when she was deflected from her purpose by the sudden appearance of a tall, erect person, panoplied in spotless white and bearing a napkined tray, in the midst of which was set forth a steaming bowl. This individual spoke no word, but there was that in the militant gleam of her eyes which caused Mrs. Buckthorn to hastily abandon her self-imposed task.

"I was jest a-lookin' fer our paster's wife's Bi-ble," she explained. But her voice had somehow lost its fearsome quality. "I didn't see it nowheres around on th' mantle-shelf ner th' table."

"No," confirmed the white linen presence briskly. "I took all the books downstairs the first thing. They harbor dust and germs."

She held the door invitingly wide.

"I don't allow visitors," she added. "You may tell the others."

The wailing baby was being vigorously trotted upon Mrs. Scrimger's knee, while an admiring and resourceful audience looked on, when Mrs. Buckthorn reappeared, much ruffled as to her spirits.

"Did you see Philura?"

"How does she look?"

"I wonder if *I* might step in, f'r just a minute," uprose in unison.

"That woman from Bos-ton," began the wife of the senior deacon, "is a child of Be-lial, if ever I see one. She actooally had the brass t' tell *me*——"

With a sudden swoop of ample white draperies the woman from Boston descended upon the group of matrons and salvaged the baby.

"You'll have to excuse me, ladies, but it makes my patient nervous to hear him cry," she vouchsafed over her shoulder, as she bore away the small bundle of lawn and flannel. There followed the sound of a door firmly closed.

"Well! *did* you *ever*?" Mrs. Scrimger wanted to know.

"Ain't we stylish!" contributed Miss Electa Pratt, with a girlish giggle. "I ain't said anythin' t' you ladies about it b'fore, but now 'at ma's passed away I b'en thinkin' of takin' up nursin', myself, an' I *offered* t' do f'r Philura 'n' th' minister—pourin' his tea 'n' like that—f'r nothin'. But it seems *I* wasn't good enough f'r *her*. She said Mis-ter Pettibone wanted a trained nurse."

"All of us ladies c'd 'a' took turns," sighed Mrs. Buckthorn. "The thought 'd come t' me. An' what a blessin' our conse-crated zeal might

'a' proved in this 'ere household! Prayer 'n' praise from mornin' till night, a-goin' up like an altar o' sacrifice."

"Maybe it would have turned out to be one," mused Mrs. Puffer, who had just run over with an extra crib-blanket.

But when pressed for an explanation, the little woman blushed very pink indeed and said she guessed she didn't mean anything—much. She added that being so constantly with the children made her sort of absent-minded.

That same afternoon, as was his custom, the Reverend Silas Pettibone emerged from his study, where he had spent the morning endeavoring to wrest the meaning from a cryptic Pauline saying, and ascended to his wife's room.

"Well, my dear," he began, after kissing the shining pale face upturned to his, "I hear Mrs. Buckthorn called to see you this morning. She stopped in the study on her way out. . . . I was rather sorry,—I—er—supposed Miss Sedgewick had—er—interdicted——"

The nurse, who was engaged in folding large squares of white cheese-cloth into infinitesimal triangles, turned quickly around.

"The woman sneaked in, sir, when my back was turned for an instant," she said. "I don't know what she did to put my patient all in a

tremble; but I shall turn the key in the lock after this when I go down to the kitchen. . . . You won't leave her, sir, while I run out for half an hour? If I thought you would——"

Mr. Pettibone was instant and earnest in avowing his purpose of guarding the sick-room against further intrusion.

But still the cautious Miss Sedgewick hesitated.

"Somebody might call to see you, sir; and while you were downstairs take advantage——"

"You could put the baby on the bed, Silas, and lock the door," suggested Mrs. Pettibone.

There was an eager gleam in her eyes which again halted the departing footsteps of authority.

"Better leave him just where he is," the nurse said firmly. "He is *not* hungry and he is perfectly comfortable. If he should cry, please remember that a certain amount of crying is good for a baby."

Her clear eyes fixed upon the minister appeared to demand some sort of guarantee of obedience.

"Certainly," said Mr. Pettibone. "Quite right. I will—er—leave the infant exactly as he is now placed in that crib. I see you have him very firmly immeshed—perhaps I might better say—er—constricted beneath his bed coverings.

. . . I—er—beg your pardon. I should have said——”

“The infant is quite comfortable,” Miss Sedgewick repeated with a touch of asperity. “Do not disturb him during my absence.”

The sound of her firm footsteps retreating down the passage, followed later by a rustling descent of the stair and the distant closing of the front door marked a period during which Mr. Pettibone sat by his wife’s side decorously perusing a work on the Social Conscience, while Mrs. Pettibone, very demure and bright eyed, watched a sunbeam coquetting with the muslin curtains.

“Now, Silas,” she said softly.

Mr. Pettibone glanced down at her with a humorous smile.

“But, my dear Philura,” he murmured, “that excellent person extracted an actual promise from me to-day. Possibly—er—she suspects us of collusion. I fear I didn’t get the trick of that tightly banded sheet over the infant’s body. Er—let me read you an illuminating passage I have just lighted upon.”

“Oh, Silas, *please*—I haven’t half looked at him yet. I feel exactly as if he—was *her* baby. She won’t allow me to hold him. . . . Anyway, we can’t afford to keep her any longer, with Mrs. Wessells in the kitchen. I must begin to take

care of him myself, and—and do things. Please let me!”

Mr. Pettibone ruffled his iron-gray hair with an impatient hand.

“I should like to give utterance to something—er—forceful concerning Mrs. Buckthorn,” he began. “Of course I can guess the sort of thing she said to you this morning; but——”

“It was all true, I’m afraid,” murmured his wife. “I can’t help feeling guilty and extravagant when I think of what I am—costing.”

Mr. Pettibone arose and very deliberately tiptoed his way across the room to the crib, where lay his son peacefully asleep.

“I am about to perjure myself, I fear, but I think we need to discuss this subject in the presence of the entire family.”

With this remark he skillfully extricated the infant from his well-ordered blankets and bore him to the bed, where he deposited him, all pink and squirming, at Mrs. Pettibone’s side.

“Oh, Silas!” she cried in an ecstasy. “I’m afraid you’ve waked him up! . . . Do look at his eyes! . . . He’s looking straight at you. . . . I wonder if his eyes will be dark like yours? They’re blue now—just see! And his hair is curly—right on top of his head. . . . Oh, you darling!”

"Speaking of expense," pursued Mr. Pettibone logically. "He's worth all he cost—isn't he?—to you and to me. . . . And I shall never forget that he nearly cost you your life. . . . If I had lost you——"

Mrs. Pettibone hid her eyes in the baby's neck.

"I had forgotten it, already," she murmured.

It seemed a sacrilege to mention anything so sordid as money at such a moment, but after a period of blissful contemplation the minister produced a roll of soiled bills from his pocket.

"Filthy lucre," he announced, "amounting to one hundred and fifty-three dollars."

"Why, Silas!"

"On account of arrears on my salary," he exulted. "Our good brother, George Trimmer, handed it to me last evening after prayer-meeting. He tells me he hopes to have the full amount by the end of next month."

Mrs. Pettibone drew the blankets softly about the baby with gentle little pats and cuddles.

"I'm ashamed of myself," she said.

"Why?"

"Because I ought to have known the money would come. . . . I ought never to doubt or be afraid of anything, now that I have you—and *him*."

"No, you ought not," he agreed, a humorous

smile touching his grave lips. "And you mustn't. Do you know I find myself singularly dependent on you, Miss Philura, for my spiritual uplift?"

Whereat they both laughed in memory of old days, happily past now and well-nigh forgotten.

"Another proof that a beneficent Providence has not failed us, my dear, appears in the fact that your house is rented at last."

"Oh, Silas!" she said again. "Really?"

"Indubitably, and your new tenants have paid down their first month's rent in advance. Here it is, less Deacon Scrimger's lawful commission and the fee to the Boston agent, who really disposed of the house for you."

He paused to observe his wife's face, glorified with a look of rapture which the insignificant sum of money he placed in her hand failed to explain.

"It is for the baby," she said, "out of the Encircling Good!"

VII

THE idea that all good things come from the unseen Beneficence we call God has been slow in making its way in the world. Like all ultimate truth it is too large to be seen in its entirety—too far-reaching to be appreciated by beings engrossed in the small affairs of daily living. So, although Miss Malvina Bennett had caught more than an occasional gleam of the universal effulgence, she was none the less perturbed when a vigorous shaking of a lank flour-bag failed to dislodge more than a scant cupful.

"Can't set no bread t'-day," she muttered. "'N' Ma hates store bread like pison." A like thorough and drastic investigation revealed the emptiness of the various showy packages ranged along her pantry shelves.

"Well, I d'clare," muttered Miss Malvina, "I ain't never been s' put to it since I begun to sew f'r a livin'. I don't wonder Ma's fractious. She needs a good meal o' warm vittles t' liven her up, 'n' th' ain't a bean o' coffee, neither."

Hastily she reviewed the meager list of her possible resources. Their solitary hen when in-

spected ruffled her feathers sulkily; the light rime of snow on the ground outside had evidently furnished no incentive to lay.

"You need comp'ny," said Miss Malvina sympathizingly. "I'm a-goin' t' let you set jes' soon 's I c'n afford a dozen reel eggs, then we'll hev some nice young pullets, come fall, 'n' mebbe a reel han'some rooster t' crow mornin's."

With this vague promise she scattered a sparse handful of corn and retreated toward the house.

"The's jes' three things I c'n do," she reflected, as she swept the snow from her front steps, oblivious to the magical splendor of the budding maples laden with pearl and ermine, through which the sun was darting jealous arrows: "I c'n go down t' th' store 'n' resk havin' Obed Salter tell me he won't trust me no more; er I c'n go t' th' pars'nage 'n' ask th' minister right out f'r the money on Philura's wrapper . . . but I will say I'd hate t' do that. Mebbe he wouldn't be up yit; 'n' what on airth would he think o' me traipsin' t' his house b'fore breakfas'—with Philura in bed 'n' all. I s'pose I c'd take that there robe back t' Mis' Hobbs. It's all done s' well 's I c'n make out with it. 'Twon't fall t' pieces first thing, anyhow. . . . I s'pose she'll find out who I be, sooner er later. 'N' other

folks will, too; but I ain't a-goin' t' let Ma starve, not s' long 's I c'n hold a needle."

She was on the point of retreating indoors when the sight of a slim figure speeding along the magical vista arrested her on the threshold.

"*Bon matin*, Mees Malvina!" cried a fresh young voice. "W'at 'appiness to see all zis beauty! Eet ees mos' *spirituelle*—like what you call 'eaven, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"How's your pa feelin' this mornin'?" inquired Miss Malvina. "I thought I'd jes' step in t' inquire after breakfas', 'n' see ef the' wa'n't somethin' I c'd do."

The little dressmaker drew the black-and-white plaid shawl closer under her chin, and stood smiling down at the girl. She could see her very distinctly, even without her far-seeing glasses, in the clear white light of the morning, and she was thinking vaguely that the vivid face upturned to hers was like no other face she had ever seen.

"*Merci* one sousand, *chère* Mees Malvina, *mon* papa 'e ees quite recover after sleep. I 'ave make already *déjeuner*. Also, I find ze shop. See, I bring *compliments* of my papa to *madame*, *votre mère*."

"We don't keep a horse," said Miss Malvina, shaking her head.

The girl was eagerly extending a basket.

"*Non?* I not un'erstan'; but for your *déjeuner*—*oui?*"

"I'm afraid I don't ketch on t' your kind of talk. You'd ought t' learn English. . . . You want I sh'd take this 'ere basket?"

The girl smiled and nodded, with a glint of white teeth between red lips. Then she consulted a small book dangling from her belt.

"See—all times I study *l'Anglais*. . . . I tell you, very queek: *Compliments*,—ze same—of *mon père*—my fat'er—to *votre mère*—your mot'er. *Voilà!* you have eet—*n'est-ce pas?* Goo'-by; you come again queek!"

"Fer th' lan' sake!" ejaculated Miss Malvina, as she investigated the contents of the basket in the privacy of her kitchen. "Them folks 're a-goin' t' be reel good neighbors; I c'n see that a'ready. I only fetched 'em over two eggs las' night, 'n' here's six an' much 's a pound o' butter, 'n' goodness knows what-all in these 'ere jars."

Over a slim bottle of suspicious aspect and many-worded foreign labels Miss Malvina shook her head.

"I'm afraid it's some sort o' intoxicatin' liquor," she said, sniffing gingerly at the seal. "Mebbe I'd better take it back an' tell 'em first thing 'at Ma an' me b'longs t' the W. C. T. U."

In the end she decided to stow the bottle out

of sight in the gloomy recesses of the upper pantry shelf.

"'Twon't do no harm up there," she told herself strongly. "But you wouldn't ketch me a-givin' it t' Ma, even if she was at death's door."

Half an hour later Miss Malvina, her best frizzed front (inherited from her grandmother) pinned firmly over her white curls and her small figure enveloped in a stiffly starched gingham apron, stood knocking at Philura Rice's back door. She still thought of the erstwhile vacant house as belonging to the wife of the minister, as did every one. Miss Philura Rice had married the Reverend Silas Pettibone three years before, to the amazement, not to say consternation of the village of Innisfield, which had long since relegated the modest little lady to the limbo of protracted maidenhood.

"My!" cogitated Miss Malvina to herself, "how many, many times I've run in here t' borrow a spoon o' bakin'-powder er like that off Philura; an' when Genevieve 'n' Greg'ry lived here, too. But th' house wa'n't big enough f'r them after th' twins was born. An' o' course Mis' Mort'mer Van Duser wanted 'em in Boston, where she c'd see 'em ev'ry day. I never seen a woman meller up the way she done after those babies——"

She paused to once more apply her knuckles in a brisk rat-tat on the closed door.

"Like enough they're makin' sech a racket movin' furnitur' they can't hear," she told herself. "I c'n see one thing: th' ain't b'en a rag laid t' them winders, 'n' it's all a body c'n do t' see through 'em, what with dust 'n' cobwebs."

Then all at once she became aware of the approach of slippered feet within. The door was opened on a cautious crack and a bearded face looked out. It was the man she had seen the night before. Miss Malvina blushed like a girl as she recalled the touch of his lips on her rough little fingers. But it seemed suddenly impossible to explain her presence on the back door-steps. For an instant she meditated flight.

"Ah! Goo'-morning," said the man. "You wish—er—to—entaire?"

Miss Bennett brightened.

"I jes' run over t'—t' help 'round a spell," she said eagerly. "I guess you was mos' too sick las' night t' take notice who 't was doin' f'r you. 'Twas reel kind t' send over them things t' Ma. She et a reel good meal o' vittles f'r th' firs' time in I don' know when. It done her good—differ'nt things, you know, 'n' like that."

The man opened the door wide, and with a courteous gesture bade the little dressmaker enter.

He was smiling and his eyes, very clear and dark, again swept the small figure.

"You 'ave ze wish to see my daughter, *n'est-ce-pas?* S'e has gone out in search of—an *ouvrière*—for the moment I cannot perceive the word; of a possibility you can inform me?"

"You c'n search me," said Miss Malvina. "Why under th' sun didn't she wait till I come over? Mebbe I c'd 'a' made out what 't was you wanted; I've lived here sence I was knee high t' a grasshopper."

The man had bent his head with grave attention.

"Your language," he said, "ees mos' engaging. Nevair do I weary of its study. But *naturellement* I spik more readily zan I comprehend. You will pardon me, I 'ave ze hope?"

"Sure I will," said Miss Malvina, with dignity. "'Tain't reelly your fault you're fur'n. An' I think you speak quite nice. . . : I see your windows ain't b'en cleaned; s'pose I whirl in an' wash 'em f'r you? I fetched some cleanin' cloths along; 's I says t' Ma, they won't hev none, 'tain't likely."

"Ah! An *ouvrière*? But surely I am mistake. Do you not live in the adjoining house?"

"Cert'nly I do—me an' Ma Bennett. I'm a dressmaker b' trade, an' gen'ally I don't have

time t' clean my own windows; but this spring I—I ain't s' busy 's usual so I got time t' burn."

"Time—to—burn?"

He smilingly shook his head.

"I am very academic, I fear. But I s'all perhaps improve; in the interval you will obligingly excuse?"

"Guess I'll hev t'," chirruped Miss Malvina. "An' I won't say I don't find it kind of enjoyable—your bein' fur'n an' so t' say differ'nt from th' folks 'round here."

Never had Miss Malvina felt more dignified and at ease. The man's gentle air of deference, his grave attention to everything she said had somehow soothed her wounded pride. Her faded eyes sparkled; she even raised a careful hand to Grandmother Bennett's legacy. It was composed of tightly frizzed and very black hair mounted on a net foundation, and it concealed very completely the feathery snow-white hair beneath. Miss Malvina had blanched early, but with the aid of the artificial front—designed for a larger head than her own—it had been possible to keep the knowledge of the fact from the general public. She was glad she had worn it this morning, instead of her every-day one, which had faded with the years to a singular greenish tint.

"L'me see," she went on, "I hed a reg'lar

interduction t' you las' night; but what with your bein' s' upset—if not reelly d'lirious—an' me a-flyin' 'round like a hen with her head cut off tryin' t' git some supper so 's you'd eat a bite—I clean fergot what 't was."

Her new neighbor shook his head regretfully.

"Again I accomplis' my ignorance," he said. "You will repeat in words more simple—is it not?"

"I f'rgot your name," said Miss Malvina, "mine's *Miss Malvina Bennett*."

"Ah—Mees Malvina Bennett; but I hastily make my introduction, my name eet ees Desaye—Ettienne Desaye—and very much at your service, Mees Malvina. You possess ze good heart."

"My land! I ain't done nothin' t' speak of," protested the little dressmaker. "Here comes Mad'lane, now. I'll bet I c'n find out what she's be'n after b'fore you c'n spell Jack Robinson."

Madeleine, colorful as a flower, ran up to Miss Malvina with a little cry of pleasure, and stooping her slim young body, touched first one faded cheek then the other with her warm, red lips.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed the astonished recipient of these favors. "I don't know when anybody's kissed me b'fore sence I was knee high

t' a grasshopper.. You two cert'nly do beat the Dutch. You ain't no more like Innisfield folks 'an th' moon's like green cheese. . . . Now, Mad'lane—I hope I got that right—I want you should tell me what you b'en lookin' fer, then we'll git t' work. I cert'nly do enjoy gassin' 's well 's the next one; but p'lite conv'sation don't saw no wood."

The process by which Miss Malvina was led to understand the significance of the word *ouvrière* was a tortuous one, and involved the use of the French and English lexicons, as well as a search through the popular phrase-book Madeleine carried at her belt.

"What a redic'lous name f'r *wash-woman!*" she exclaimed, when at last light broke upon her bewildered mind. "But I c'n tell you they're scurcer 'n hen's teeth this spring. L'me see: Mis' Wessells is t' th' pars'nage, 'n' likely 'll stay there f'r a spell on 'count of Mis' Rev'ren' Pettibone's baby. . . . You'll git t' know *her* reel well, once she gits 'round agin. She owns this 'ere house, an' she's th' greatest little woman—she c'n tell you all about how t' git anythin' you want out th' surroundin' atmosphere. She got her husban' that-a-way 'n' all her best clo'es. But I don' know; I ain't had s' much luck, myself. . . . Now, I guess we'll tackle this 'ere kitchen, first

off, 'n' ef your pa c'n make out t' do a little unpackin' we'll soon hev things ship-shape. 'N' even ef I can't make out *all* you say, actions cert'nly do speak louder 'n' words, 'n' I guess you'll find I ain't afraid t' whirl in 'n' work, ef I ain't a reg'lar whachucallem, goin' out b' th' day."

By noon shining windows, clean paint, and vigorously scrubbed floors attested the genuineness of Miss Malvina's professions, while the new proprietors of Miss Philura's abandoned dwelling showed themselves equally expeditious and resourceful. Indeed, Miss Bennett, in one of her flying trips across the yard in quest of a fresh supply of "winder rags" reported to Ma progress of an astonishing character.

"They ain't got sech a-nawful lot o' stuff," she said; "but I'll bet you'll be s'prised t' see their parlor. Don't look a speck like any other room in town; first thing Mr. Dassay done was t' fix a lot o' books on shelves, 'n' she whips up some han'some lace curtains t' th' winders b'fore I c'd git 'em good 'n' polished. They got pictur's, too, 'n' queer kinds o' vases 'n' like that, 'n' rugs. You'd ought t' see them rugs—thick 's a board 'n' all colors—kind o' mixy, I thought. I'd ruther lay down a good red 'n' black ingrain, m'self, with a layer o' straw in under it t' keep the wind offen y'r feet; but bein' fur'n I s'pose they don't know

no better. They even hung up some of them rugs on th' walls. I had t' laugh!"

Late that afternoon the little dressmaker stood looking about her at the rooms so swiftly transformed from dreary emptiness to snug comfort, albeit of a singular and foreign sort hitherto unknown in Innisfield.

"Well, 'twas lucky f'r you folks I wa'n't so drove in m' shop es usual," she said complacently. "'N' I will say it looks reel nice, upstairs 'n' down, not 'at I ever heerd o' sech a thing es hangin' up goods b' th' yard on th' walls with brass-headed tacks. But this 'ere blue 'n' white stripe cert'nly does look pretty with Mad'lane's white furnitur'. 'N' th' red 's reel cheerful in your Pa's room. . . . But I got t' go now 'n' git Ma Bennett's supper b'fore she gits fractious."

"*Chère* Mees Malvina," said the girl, "one sousand time we are oblige; but you will permit—you will not be offend——"

She glanced appealingly at her father.

"We wish—wiz our t'anks—to also make ze reward suitable," said M. Desaye, with a propitiatory smile, "you will permit—is it not?"

He produced from his waistcoat pocket a small white envelope which he handed to Miss Malvina, with a courteous bow. She opened it to

find within a neatly folded bank-note. Just why Miss Malvina should have experienced a shock of bitter resentment at sight of money so hardly earned and so sorely needed furnishes a psychological problem of considerable interest. She was in the habit of earning money by the labor of her hands; then why not this money? Was there, one might inquire, any real difference between plying the needle and the scrubbing-brush? That there was a difference, wide and deep, was evidenced by Miss Malvina's unpremeditated behavior on this occasion.

"Sakes alive!" she cried, her small figure quite rigid with indignation. "Th' simple idee o' tryin' t' pay me f'r what I done, like I was Louisa Wessells er Mis' Jabez Trimble! I come over t' do f'r you folks friendly, b'cause you was neighbors 'n' b'cause——"

Something very like a sob choked further utterance; but Miss Malvina managed clearly to convey her utter repudiation of the idea of recompense by casting the envelope and its contents at the feet of the man who had offered it.

"I'd hev you t' understan' I don't go out b' th' day except t' sew—an' only then t' 'commode m' reg'lar cust'mers," she went on, a bright color staining her faded cheeks. "Ef I want t' do a kindness f'r folks I guess I kin do it, without bein'

slapped in th' face—an' me a member in good 'n' reg'lar standin'!"

The innocent offenders stood stupefied, aghast. The girl began a hurried search through her phrase-book, while the man rumpled his hair—which was somewhat long and curling and frosted lightly with silver—with a gesture of despair.

"*Hélas!*" he murmured. "I am *inconsolable!* Too leetle? Too much? or not at all—I ask you? But w'y? . . . W'y s'ould you derange yourself for us—not of your country?"

Miss Malvina's wrath suddenly vanished into thin air.

"That's so!" she chuckled. "A body'd ought t' keep in mind constant that you can't help bein' fur'n. As f'r bein' d'ranged, insanity don't run in our fambly, so you needn't be skeered; I git mad quick, but it don't last no time. . . . I see you didn't know no better; so we'll call it square."

"We call eet sq-ware—but what ees sq-ware, dear Mees Malvina?" entreated Madeleine. "Eet ees of a frien'ly—*n'est-ce pas?*"

"Good land, yes!" laughed the little dress-maker, her dignified complacency quite restored. "You're 'nough t' kill corn—th' two of you; but I guess you mean all right."

In the chill dusk of the April evening, while ashes of violet and rose still mingled in the west,

Miss Malvina sped like a shadow under the budding elms. In a flat parcel under her arm was the brown-and-purple "robe," substantially stitched and conscientiously finished.

Mrs. Hobbs, still environed with the as yet inchoate creations of her genius, welcomed her with unaffected emotion.

"I've put in a terrible day," she confessed. "What with ladies telephoning, and coming in droves to talk over styles. . . . You say this is all finished? Well, I'll look it over as soon 's I get a chance, an' let your friend know if she's to send for more."

But Miss Malvina stiffened her spine, in a valiant effort not to notice the heaps of silk and lengths of trimming which littered the chairs and tables.

"You'll look it over an' pay fer it now, right down in my hand, same's you promised," she said firmly. "I don' know es anybody c'd say much fer th' looks o' that there robe of Mis' Deaconess Buckthorn's; but 't won't fall t' pieces first time she puts it on; 'n' th' plackets won't bust out, neither, 'n' it's be'n evened up 'round th' bottom. Why, sakes alive, Miss Hobbs, that hem was three inches wide in the front o' th' skirt an' two 'n' a quarter in th' back; 'n' th' hooks 'n' eyes on th' waist didn't no more gibe 'n' anythin'. I c'd 'a'

done better 'n' that at dressmakin' when I was ten years old."

Mrs. Hobbs chafed her reddened nose with a breadth of cambric. "I hope you haven't spoiled the hang of the skirt," she said fretfully.

"*Spoiled?—me—spoiled?*" echoed Miss Malvina indignantly. Then she took refuge in a fit of coughing.

"Of course I know who you are," pursued Mrs. Hobbs; "I asked Mrs. Salter to-day, an' she told me."

"I ain't ashamed t' be knowed," stated Miss Malvina. "I came up here in th' first place, like th' children of Israel went in the Promised Land, t' see what sort of a shop you kep', an' whether you was goin' t' freeze me out permanent. . . . The minute I laid my eyes on this 'ere robe I quit worryin'."

"What do you mean?" inquired Mrs. Hobbs feebly.

"Jest what I say. I ain't worried a mite. 'Twon't be no time b'fore they'll all be back a-pes-terin' me f'r some reel sewin'. These 'ere throwed t'gether *robes* ain't a-goin' t' take in this 'ere town, I know; I've sewed f'r 'em, off 'n' on, f'r thirty years."

"I wonder you dare talk to me like that," almost whimpered Mrs. Hobbs, with a vain

effort after dignity. "All my clientele admire my superior taste."

Miss Bennett gazed at her rival pityingly.

"I'm reel sorry f'r you," she said. "Honest, I be."

"Sorry—for *me*? Why, my good woman, I——"

"Uh-huh! 'n' I'll tell you why. You can't hold this 'ere trade with th' kind o' work you're doin'. It'll peter out on you in no time."

Mrs. Hobbs fingered her frizzes with an assumption of ease she was far from feeling.

"I never heard of such a thing as a person like you," she stammered. "It—it's the most extraordinary idea——"

"Well, I'll tell you, Mis' Hobbs, I got kind of des'prit, what with losin' all my cust'mers, 'n' th' rent 'n' groc'ries runnin' b'hind. I got Ma Bennett t' do for; Ma's goin' on seventy-nine. She come t' live with me last winter after m' brother died. She ain't got nobody but me, now. An' thinks s' I, I got t' do somethin' right off. . . . You'd laff if I was t' tell you how skeered I was t' come up them stairs th' first time. Ef you'd a' b'en a roarin' rhinoc'rus I couldn't 'a' felt more shrinkin'."

Mrs. Hobbs moved restlessly in her chair.

"You c'n go right on sewin'; don't mind me,"

said Miss Bennett kindly. "I'd reelly like t' see how your s'perior taste 'll work out on that there green costume—the one on the figur'. . . . But, es I was sayin', I jes' took th' bit in m' teeth an' tromped on all my mos' sacred feelin's. *Now* I see you ain't no better off 'n' I be, fer all y'r gilt sign 'n' y'r *Madame* 'n' y'r heaps o' work. I ain't got 'nough work, 'n' you got too much. Ef I whirl in 'n' help you out—same's we talked las' night—me a-doin' reel honest sewin' like folks 'round here 're used to, you may last out quite a spell. Ef you won't, why——"

Miss Bennett's eloquent hands disclaimed all further responsibility for Mrs. Hobbs' career.

"You cert'nly have got *nerve*," murmured the new dressmaker; but she said it almost admiringly.

"So 've you," returned Miss Bennett promptly, "er you wouldn't be here."

The two women stared at each other fixedly for an instant: then Mrs. Hobbs' watery gaze fell.

"You want I should pay you for this?" she inquired uncertainly.

"Uh-huh, an' give me some more work; I got t' live whilst I'm waitin'."

This ominous reference to the future appeared to galvanize Madame Louise into action. She arose and fetched a plethoric purse.

"How—much do I owe you?" she hesitated. "I mean how long—we agreed by the day, didn't we?"

"I put in five hours, stiddy," stated Miss Malvina. "So it comes t' a dollar 'n' a half, even money. That robe 's all ready t' send home—'s much 's it ever will be this side o' Jordan. . . . It'll be reel enjoyable t' see Mis' Buckthorn come sailin' down th' center aisle with it on. . . ."

The clash of the three silver half dollars was music in Miss Malvina's ears, as she sped homeward clasping a great parcel of work in her thin little arms.

"Ain't I glad I stepped on m' pride an' roused m' grit 'n' gumption?" she said to herself. "'Twon't be no time b'fore I c'n hold up m' head with th' best of 'em—all m' bills paid 'n' money laid by. 'N' ef that ain't a lot better 'n' settin' 'round cryin' over spilt milk my name ain't Malvina Bennett!"

VIII

YOUNG Harry Schwartz whistled pleasantly to himself as he applied a liquid polish to the body of his automobile, which under the further urge of his muscular arms assumed a specious semblance of newness. It was a second-hand car of humble origin, and the young man, contrary to the advice of his prudent parents, had just taken one hundred and twenty-five dollars from his modest savings to pay for it.

"Harry," said a voice from an open window close at hand, "is that my new dust-cloth you're using? I've been looking for it everywhere."

The young man grinned.

"Shouldn't wonder, ma," he confessed. "Is this it—with du-daddles in pink worked round the edge? Crabbed it from a bag behind the door. Just the thing for polishing. Say, ma, come on out and view the flivver! She sure is some car."

Mrs. Schwartz presently emerged from the back door, an apron over her head. She was a pretty, fair-haired little woman, and her big son gazed down at her with an amused smile.

"What you going to do with me, mamma—

spat my hands?" he inquired good-humoredly. "I had a sneaking notion I was appropriating something valuable; but I was in a hurry. . . . Got the knock out the engine; she runs like a breeze now. Want a ride?"

"Oh, Harry, just look at the grease spots on your new clothes," wailed his mother. "Why didn't you put on your overalls?"

The young man surveyed his stalwart person with smiling unconcern.

"That's nothing," he said rather grandly. "Gas'll take it out. Run in and get your coat and we'll take a spin. I want you to hear her purr."

But Mrs. Schwartz shook her head. She had a cake in the oven, she said. Besides, there was the week's mending to attend to. She stood for a minute gazing about her, a proud light of happiness in her eyes; in the rear was the garden, already plowed in anticipation of fresh vegetables and a harvest of gay annuals; then there was the house, its upper story covered with weathered shingles, its clapboards below freshly painted a light brown, trimmed with white. Everything she looked upon was spotlessly neat and all their own. Even the window-panes glittered in the bleak sunshine—she had just washed them—and the shades were pulled to the precise middle of the sash; beneath them one caught glimpses of

fresh muslin curtains. There was a bay-window at the side, with a yellow canary, singing shrilly, and a flourishing rubber plant which had been treated to its weekly bath of milk and water. A narrow concrete walk led around the house to the front, where it joined a wide expanse of the same useful substance which conducted one neatly to the street. The Schwartz house was almost exactly like four other houses in the immediate neighborhood; on other streets not far distant were similar structures—all with shingled second stories, narrow front porches, and jutting bay-windows. And such is the solidarity of human nature, this very similarity added a fine savor of complacency to Mrs. Schwartz's reflections. Any one could see theirs was a new house by merely looking at it, and there were so many old houses in Innisfield. Indeed, it was only lately that the young Boston architect, with plans which seemed so nearly to fit the average income, had come to Innisfield. There was also the Building and Loan Association, a convenient bridge between inchoate ambition and its fulfillment. Harry worked for the Building and Loan, hence the savings and the second-hand car.

After all, nothing of what she saw would have mattered much if it were not for Harry. Her fond maternal gaze rested upon her one surviving child as he bent to his task. He was a handsome

lad—other people besides his mother said so—and she was never tired of contemplating his ruddy complexion, his light curling hair, his frank blue eyes, all of which fittingly crowned a good six feet of muscular, well-developed body. As she closed the door of her kitchen upon the pleasant picture of her boy trundling slowly out to the street, his face as shining as the newly polished car, she fondly reviewed her ambitions for Harry's future. He was to go on working—and laying up money—till he had enough to buy a building lot. She had her eye on one, already, not a stone's throw from the family dwelling. On this lot Harry would—with the aid of the Building and Loan Association—build a house, with a shingled top story, a bay-window, a front porch, and cement walks.

Inside there would be, of course, a reception hall, a parlor, with a dining-room just back of it, both rooms closely associated with the kitchen by a "butler's pantry." She believed Harry should have hot-water heat, instead of steam. It sounded more elegant and expensive, somehow; but for the rest his house should be precisely like all the other half-shingled houses, a few of which were distinguished by red or green roofs. It cost more to have a colored roof, and the brilliant tints of the freshly stained shingles had a provoking tend-

ency to fade to the same dull hue of untreated roofs. But if Harry wanted a red or green roof he should have one.

Mrs. Schwartz took her cake from the oven—it was in three layers, and baked to a delicate brown. By the time she had built her three layers into a perfect structure with chocolate frosting (which Harry liked) she had come to the difficult matter of choosing Harry's wife. The little woman wrinkled her forehead and pursed up her lips, as she passed the girls of Harry's age in critical review. Not one of them seemed to entirely fill the requirements. It was natural for Harry to want to marry a pretty girl; but having conceded this much to the unthinking masculine nature, Mrs. Schwartz could not help reflecting on the well-known fact that pretty girls, as a rule, are far less fitted to the domestic treadmill than their plainer sisters. They were more apt to be idle, vain, and fond of a good time. It was impossible to think of her son's new house presided over by a woman of that sort.

"Harry's always been used to having things *just so*," mused Mrs. Schwartz, as she set her cake to cool in close proximity to a lemon pie topped by a fabulous meringue. "And he never could stand it any other way."

As she washed her hands at the sink she

resolved to guard Harry against the machinations of certain young ladies whom she forebore to name to herself; but who none the less appeared to threaten peaceful possession of her idol.

"Harry's a good boy," she told herself proudly, "he'll never go against his mother, when it comes to getting married. And anyway, there isn't any hurry."

Then she took her basket of mending and sat down in the bay-window to darn stockings, complacently aware of the hard-won order and immaculate Saturday cleanliness of her small domain and of the two dollars and thirty-nine cents she had contrived to save from her house-keeping allowance that week. Unconsciously her small, blond face took on the look of a flower tightly closed against the sun after its one day of blossoming, no more the rendezvous of wandering bee or vagrant butterfly, but secretly and exclusively occupied with its own concerns.

In the meantime, young Harry Schwartz had driven his car straight down the main street of Innisfield with a fine, expansive joy welling up within him and overflowing in smiles on his handsome ruddy face. With his cap pushed well back on his crisp hair he grasped the steering-wheel with both hands, his eyes fixed on the road which appeared to leap forward to meet him.

That several of his acquaintances stopped to stare after him he guessed rather than saw. He had never driven a car before, and it was necessary to give his entire attention to the matter. After a while, he had been told, it would become as easy as riding a bicycle—easier, indeed.

He was wondering if he could turn the thing around, as the houses slipped away from him on either side. In a very few minutes he was clear of the village on the narrow country road, which led between farm lands substantially fenced to a cross-roads, dividing the valley in half. He reflected that he could easily turn his machine around at the intersection of the two roads. It was then that he saw a woman's figure walking slowly toward the sunset. She would, of course, get out of his way when she heard the car approaching. To his surprise she did nothing of the sort. He reached for his horn, which gave forth a feeble honk; then trod savagely on everything in sight.

Things happened swiftly and consecutively after that: the car essayed nimbly to leap the stone wall; failing in this it turned squarely around and toppled over on its side, where it gasped and rattled convulsively. Its owner, rather white and shaken, climbed out over the uppermost wheel. He wasn't even scratched, for which miracle he

should have been devoutly grateful. Instead, he was conscious only of an immense and growing indignation with the cause of the disaster. He finally succeeded in quieting the sputtering engine, after which he turned upon the girl, who stood quite still, her hands clasped, her eyes wide with terror and dismay.

"Well!" said the young man. "What in the dickens! Why didn't you get out of the way?"

He must have loomed very tall and threatening and, for all his youthful good looks, a terrifying sort of a figure, for the girl slowly backed away from him without attempting a reply.

"You must be deaf and dumb!" he went on, still hotly. "Didn't you hear me blow my horn?"

The girl essayed to speak, failed; then without a further glance at him turned and walked swiftly away.

Harry Schwartz stared after her open-mouthed. He was beginning to realize dazedly two things he had at first been too shaken and angry to notice: the first was that she was extraordinarily and vividly pretty—for all her pallor; second, that he had never seen her before.

"Whew! but she's some sprinter!" he muttered. And forthwith broke into a long stride which brought him abreast of the culprit.

"What's the idea in running away so fast, Miss—er—eh?" he propounded. Mendaciously he added: "I may need your help, you know."

The girl flashed him a dark glance.

"You aire one rude person," she said calmly. "You un'erstan' me—eh? *Sans raison—bête!*"

"What's that?" cried the young man. "Say! I like that!"

"You like eet—eh? *Eh bien*—I not like eet, *absolument!*"

"But you should have gotten out of the road. I honked all right. I might have been killed, you know."

The girl made no reply. And after a perplexed silence he went on. "Maybe you didn't know any better. I guess you're a stranger—some sort of foreigner—eh?"

She surveyed him haughtily from under her lashes.

"I promenade myself, *pour des œufs frais*—w'at you call aigs. Me—I t'ank you for not sm-ash."

Harry Schwartz stared. Then he threw back his head and laughed whole-heartedly.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "I must go back and see what I have to thank you for. But it's strictly up to you to help me set the flivver on her feet, don't you know."

The girl listened attentively to this speech, a little puzzled frown puckering her white forehead.

"Stric'ly-up-t'-you," she repeated; "me—I not know."

The color had come back to lips and cheeks. She smiled, revealing adorable dimples in the corners of her mouth.

He gazed down at her with a growing sense of wonder.

"Say, where did you come from?" he asked. "I never saw you before. . . . You sure are one beaut," he added, confident of not being understood.

She glanced back at the prostrate automobile; then at its owner, a tardy sense of compunction dawning in her eyes.

"I aid you?" she propounded sweetly.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, feeling suddenly ashamed of himself. "The fact is, I'm a green-horn at driving. I should have stopped until you got past the cross-roads. I meant to have turned around there."

"You feex; *moi aussi*," she offered confidently. "Oui?"

She had turned squarely about and was hurrying back toward the scene of the disaster.

Young Harry Schwartz followed.

"I suppose she's teetotally on the bum," he murmured disconsolately. "First time I had her out, too."

The girl bestowed her precious basket under a bush.

"*Voila!* We make eet," she said eagerly.

"Well, I don't know about that," he doubted; "I don't want to muss her up any more than I can help."

He gazed ruefully at his treasure; then he saw that she was valiantly dragging a rail from the fence.

"Oh, I say! that's too much for you. . . . But I get you. Put a lever under her—eh? Guess you're right."

Ten minutes later the little car stood squarely on its four wheels once more, a trifle scratched, to be sure, its mud-guard bent; but, on the whole, vindicating the modest claims of its maker.

Then Harry Schwartz quite forgot the girl in the all-engrossing business of examining the mechanism under the hood of his machine. When he finally glanced up she had disappeared, and neither vista of the country road afforded so much as a flutter of her blue skirts.

"Well, I like that!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "And I didn't even find out her name."

IX

THE Reverend Silas Pettibone, attired in his second-best preaching clothes—dedicated to parish visiting and rainy-day funerals—bent to kiss his wife good-by. He was not a demonstrative man, and heretofore his caresses had been of a sparse and meager nature, commensurate with the dignified reserve of his character. But there was something about the glorified face of his wife in these early days of her motherhood which seemed to draw kisses as the sun is said to draw water, when it sends earthward long, luminous rays from behind an effulgent cloud curtain.

Mrs. Pettibone was wearing the blue negligee adorned with cascades of white lace, upon which Malvina Bennett had lavished the pent-up poetry of her lone maidenhood. She looked very small and delicate in the shabby old rocking-chair; and no one but the most discerning would have identified the inert flannel bundle in her arms as a real live baby.

"I suppose I ought to put him down the minute he goes to sleep," she apologized—having accepted his kiss with the slight tinge of maidenly embarrassment she had never quite lost.

"According to book, my dear, you should put him down before he goes to sleep," offered Mr. Pettibone, drawing on his gloves. . . . "You're looking remarkably sweet today, Miss Philura," he added, with the total irrelevance she had noticed in him of late.

She blushed becomingly.

"But if he should cry——" she temporized.

"Haven't you learned by this time that it is the inalienable right of the infant to cry?" he asked. "How else shall he strengthen his lungs, expand his—er—diaphragm and——"

"Kittens don't cry," she said stoutly, "nor nice little roly-poly puppies, nor little birds; their mothers cuddle them all the while and feed them whenever they like."

"A cat, a dog, or a fowl of the air, in any stage of its existence," he reminded her gravely, "could hardly be compared with a human being."

But she merely cuddled the flannel bundle closer and murmured something in which he caught the words "p'ecious lamb."

"As for sheep and their offspring," he went on, still argumentatively, "one should really——"

"Silas," she interrupted him, "did you pay Miss Malvina for making this wrapper?"

"Did I—pay Miss Malvina?"

He rumbled his hair.

"I have no remembrance—er—let me recall: Miss Bennett brought that—er—very becoming garment to the parsonage the day of the advent, when such trifles as clothes and money were far from my thoughts. As far—I venture to say—as from Jacob, the morning after he had wrestled with the angel and received his new name. . . . No, my dear, I did not pay Miss Malvina."

"Then won't you go there today, Silas? Do you know I'm afraid poor dear Malvina is being quite cut out by the new dressmaker."

"The new dressmaker—ah? I was not aware——"

"Over Trimmer's store; don't you remember? We were going to call; only I——"

"Ah, yes! I fear I have laid myself open to a charge of neglect of parochial duties during these last weeks; but now that you are—now that I have you safe——"

"And the baby," she put in, touching her lips to the fraction of a downy head which peeped out from the blankets.

"Oh, the baby, of course—now that I have you *both* quite safe and—er—reasonably established in health I must——"

"And there is the new family in my house, too, and Mrs. Salter, with another of her spells."

"Quite right—quite right, my dear. . . . Now

if you will allow me to bestow our son in his crib, I will go. You should rest till tea-time."

He left her rather hastily at last, having inadvertently waked up the baby, who began at once to exercise his inalienable human rights, as differentiated from the animal creation.

He decided to call upon the new dressmaker first, after looking in for a moment upon Brother George Trimmer in his place of business.

Though not a shrewd man in the secular sense, the minister had not infrequently been led to meditate upon the singular metamorphosis which came over various members of his flock at the dawning of the Sabbath. On a Sunday morning Elder Trimmer was invariably to be found in his pew in church, attired somberly in a long-tailed coat, once decreed by fashion as the habit of a worldly society, now by universal consent the garb of piety. With his Sunday clothes Brother Trimmer, in common with other members of Mr. Pettibone's congregation, habitually assumed an expression of superior sanctity. When he walked down the aisle with the collection plate, and when he stood before the pulpit, awaiting the minister's benediction on the perfunctory pennies and nickels representing Innisfield's benevolent impulses, the beholders could scarcely help but notice the sleekness with which his sparse hair had been brushed,

the whiteness of his starched linen and the solemn squeak of his Sabbath shoes. Elder George Trimmer was an indispensable pillar in the house of his God; and he knew it. Without his support and presence "the cause" in Innisfield would assuredly languish, if not completely collapse. The knowledge of this fact lent force and cogency to his utterances—more particularly when he conversed with his pastor.

On the present occasion Mr. Trimmer was intrenched behind his desk when Mr. Pettibone called, and from this stronghold he vouchsafed the briefest of nods and an inarticulate growl of recognition.

"I see you are busy, Brother Trimmer," said the minister politely; "I will call again."

Mr. Trimmer waved his hand, with some impatience.

"Sit down; sit down, sir," he said. "See you in a minute. Have something to say to you."

Mr. Pettibone declined to avail himself of the indicated chair. "—er—I have a small commission for Mrs. Pettibone," he recollected. "I will attend to that first, if you please."

The minister's experienced eye had caught sight of a new clerk in the shoe department. As he threaded his way among the bargain-laden

tables in the aisles, he continued to examine the face of the stranger.

The young man, unaware of his approach, stood with folded arms staring at the wall of yellow shoe-boxes which confronted him; but it was evident to the most casual observer that his attention was not focused upon the stock of footwear in the Trimmer Dry-goods Emporium. It was a handsome, though rather sullen face, with sternly compressed lips and a deep fold between the gray eyes, which turned in response to Mr. Pettibone's question.

"Slippers? Yes, sir; what size?"

"Something soft—er—and becoming, in a light blue," particularized Mr. Pettibone.

"For a lady," inferred the young man. "What size did you say, sir?"

"Oh—er—as to that, I'm afraid I neglected to inquire. The lady is small and slender."

"Better have the lady come in and try them on, sir, if you don't know the size."

Mr. Pettibone shook his head.

"That would be impossible for some weeks yet, I fear. The lady is—er—at present she is unable to leave the house."

"Why not bring in one of the lady's shoes, then?" suggested Mr. Trimmer's clerk, scanning his customer with faint amusement.

"You are a stranger in Innisfield, I believe," interpolated Mr. Pettibone. "I don't remember to have seen you before."

"Haven't been here long," admitted the young man.

His brooding eyes sought a distant window, with an expression vaguely suggestive of a wild creature unexpectedly trapped.

"Er—permit me to introduce myself," said the minister pleasantly: "I am Mr. Pettibone, pastor of the Presbyterian Church here. We shall be glad to make you welcome. Er—what was your last place of residence?"

The young man hurriedly replaced the cover on a half-open box.

"London," he replied briefly.

"Ah, indeed!" commented the minister. "But I recall that there is a town by that name in a neighboring county—am I to understand——"

The handsome, sullen face flushed darkly.

"I mean England," he jerked out. "I was born there."

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mr. Pettibone, with unaffected surprise. "We are all interested—rather particularly interested, I may say—in your native land at this time. Are you—er—you have been here some time, I suppose?"

"A matter of six months," replied the young man.

The dark flush had crept up to the roots of his hair. He stared defiantly at Mr. Pettibone.

"Then you don't care to buy anything today, sir?"

This was clearly a rebuff; but the minister inured to reprisals of the kind persevered.

"I should be glad of your name and address; er—I'll look at those slippers again in just a moment. Er—you will, perhaps, know what size small ladies usually wear."

The minister had taken a notebook and pencil from his pocket and stood waiting with the smile many people found quite irresistible.

The young Englishman shrugged his shoulders.

"My name is Hobbs," he said unwillingly. "Kitchener Hobbs."

Mr. Pettibone, glancing up quickly, caught the look which accompanied the simple statement. It puzzled him.

"Named for the great soldier—eh? Sad thing for England—his death. Very unfortunate, it would seem. . . . And your address?"

"I live upstairs with my mother."

"With your mother? I was not aware——"

Mr. Hobbs showed no lively interest in Mr. Pettibone's bewilderment. He had pulled down

and opened several boxes containing felt slippers.

"Something like this, sir?" he inquired, civilly enough; "in size three maybe, or four."

Mr. Pettibone restored his memorandum book to his pocket and focused his short-sighted eyes upon a pair of pale blue slippers, adorned with fluffy pompons and a lavish display of satin ribbon.

"These look about the thing," he said, measuring the dainty trifle thoughtfully upon his outspread palm. "Her feet are slender and not much larger than a child's. . . . You say your mother—er—Mrs. Hobbs—am I right?"

"She calls herself—Madam Louise," growled the young fellow; "she's a dressmaker."

"Ah, yes, yes! Now I place you," said Mr. Pettibone, as he searched his pockets for a certain thin roll of bills. He appeared not to notice the extreme reluctance of the reply, yet all the while he was keenly aware of it, and of the deepening of the frown between the somber young eyes.

"Now, why," the minister asked himself—as he strode away, the pale blue slippers safely bestowed in his pocket—why should this young man, secure from the perils and hardships of war, and, one would say, reasonably well placed in business—and for what does he wear the look of a soul tormented?

X

IT being Mr. Pettibone's particular business to search out the answer to such questions, he proceeded at once to call upon Mrs. Hobbs, who chose to call herself "Madame Louise"—though for what purpose he could only vaguely surmise. As he applied his gloved knuckles to the door bearing the flourishing gold script of mystery, it occurred to the minister that he had neglected to avail himself of Mr. Trimmer's invitation—or was it a command?—to return to the office. He knew from past experience that he would later be obliged to pay for this omission, Elder Trimmer's temper being none of the best on any day of the week. Then the door opened and he became at once absorbed in the business of his calling.

As it happened, Mrs. Hobbs' establishment was at the moment free from her numerous patrons. She therefore received the minister graciously, betraying little of the surprise she felt at his visit. On his part, Mr. Pettibone—after begging the lady to go on with her avocation, which at the

moment appeared to concern itself with an intricate arrangement of cord and buttons on a bodice of peculiar shape and color—seated himself and gazed kindly at his hostess.

“I have just had the pleasure of meeting your son,” he began. “He tells me he is a native of England.”

A flicker of Mrs. Hobbs’ eyelids and the sudden snap of her needle prefaced her reply.

“Yes, sir; but I’m an American. I was born in Boston.”

“Ah!” murmured Mr. Pettibone, aware of a slight bristling, as of defiant feathers. “Were you—er—long a resident of England?”

Mrs. Hobbs shot a furtive glance at her questioner. What she saw was a man of dignified presence, well on in middle life, his hair of iron gray swept carelessly back from a broad forehead, his eyes keen yet kindly, his mouth slightly humorous, and his chin square and firm. The women of his parish, for the most part, liked Mr. Pettibone. They found it a comfort to tell him their trials and perplexities. His advice and his sympathy were alike welcome.

“I used to go to the Unitarian Church, before I was married,” offered Mrs. Hobbs, after a slight pause, during which she set several random stitches in her work; “but after we moved to the

old country I got confirmed. My husband was a churchman."

There was pride, of a sort, in the statement and a veiled protest which reached its mark.

"If you are an Episcopalian," said Mr. Pettibone hastily, "I shall not presume to urge the claims of my own church upon you. It is my custom, however, to call upon all newcomers, for the purpose of ascertaining their church affiliations. More than once, I am glad to tell you, I have been able to be of service, in the way of finding a church home for strangers."

"Well, we ain't been to church since we came back to America," stated Mrs. Hobbs. "Hoddy, he don't care much for church, and I—well, I've been kind of busy."

The woman's expression appeared to shut the door upon further inquiry. Mr. Pettibone paused to reflect, the memory of the gloomy young face below stairs recurring to his mind.

"Most people need friends," he said persuasively. "And I'll venture to tell you, Mrs. Hobbs, that I could not help seeing that your son——"

He paused to choose his words with care:

"Er—in short, he struck me as being depressed, perhaps I would better say harassed

over something. Young men interest me strongly. I—er—have a son, myself, growing up.”

The woman’s stiff features unbent in a smile.

“Your son ain’t so very old, is he?—If you’re the Mr. Pettibone I’ve heard my customers tell about in the shop.”

The minister’s pale face became suffused with youthful color, but he achieved his reply with creditable dignity.

“The fact that my son is—er—still in his infancy does not impugn my statement,” he said strongly. “If a young person, of either sex, is unhappy, that person is, in my opinion, liable to peculiar temptation.”

Mrs. Hobbs shrugged her shoulders.

“Well, I don’t know as I mind telling you what ails my boy,” she said: “He was set and determined on going to the war.”

“Ah!”

The monosyllable, exhaled mildly from the minister’s lips expressed his sudden illumination, tinged with a certain inchoate sympathy.

Mrs. Hobbs glanced at him suspiciously, her needle like a slim dagger poised in air.

“I guess you wouldn’t want your boy put down in a nasty muddy trench to be fired at,” she said.

“No,” said Mr. Pettibone, drawing his

brows together. "No; I should not. . . . And yet——"

"For goodness sake! I hope you ain't going to encourage him in any such foolishness!" cried Mrs. Hobbs, with sudden sharpness. "It was all I could do to coax him over here to America, where he'd be safe. I got down on my knees to my own child, I did! An' even then he wouldn't have come, but the doctor said I had heart trouble an' was liable to die most any minute, if I got excited."

Mr. Pettibone gazed at the woman with strong kindness in his eyes. But he offered no comment on what she had said.

After a moment of silence she went on:

"I'm willing to work my fingers to the bone for Hoddy, and he knows it. Yet all he thinks about day and night is getting back to England. I guess he wants to get killed and leave me—alone."

Her voice trailed off in a sob. She wiped her eyes on the gaudy garment she was fashioning.

"But I tell him I'll jab a hatpin through my heart before I let him go. And I will, too! I'm not going to give up my son to any old King or Czar; why should I? I'm an American."

"Is your husband——? I suppose Mr. Hobbs is not living?"

Mr. Pettibone's voice, like his eyes, conveyed his perplexed compassion.

"Well," said Mrs. Hobbs, after a pause, "I call myself a widow. But I don't know whether Hobbs is dead or alive. I don't care so much, either. He was a seafaring man. He never came back from his last voyage. They said he deserted in a China port. But folks have a way of disappearing in those parts, and you never can tell. . . . That was years ago."

The minister nodded thoughtfully.

"I see—I see," he murmured. "You have only your boy."

The sudden passion of mother-love which flared up in the woman's sallow face startled him. It was as if the sun had suddenly burst forth upon a sodden landscape, glorifying it to an evanescent splendor. Yet she only said, with a sigh:

"Hoddy's always been a good boy."

"He seems an intelligent fellow," Mr. Pettibone recollected vaguely.

It occurred to him that he should be going, in order to compass the other visits he had planned.

"He's had the best of schooling," Mrs. Hobbs said proudly. "I had a shop in London, sir. Hobbs set me up in a small way, for fear, as he said, something might 'appen to him. When the war broke out my boy was nearly through

the London Technical School. He'd have finished in another six months. But when it came to enlisting for the war and talk of conscription, I sold out and came straight home. . . . I guess I had a right to come home. I wasn't no Londoner. And my boy's American, if he was born on the other side."

"He wouldn't acknowledge it," said Mr. Pettibone, as he rose to go. "He told me his name was Kitchener Hobbs."

"That was his father's doings," Mrs. Hobbs said fretfully. "I wanted to call him George Washington; but my husband was a Britisher, through and through. He named him Horatio Herbert Kitchener."

She followed her visitor to the door, trailing dropped spools and lengths of scarlet cord behind her.

"I don't want my affairs talked about," she said, as the minister shook her limp hand at parting. "We want to keep to ourselves and not bother with anybody, me and Hoddy. I can't say what possessed me to tell you what I did. But if you could keep Hoddy's mind off soldiering, I might maybe——"

"You may trust my discretion, madam," Mr. Pettibone assured her; "and I shall be glad of another opportunity of talking with your boy."

The sun was near its setting as the minister walked slowly down the long village street, his hands folded loosely behind him. He noted abstractedly the bands of pale yellow and amethyst deepening to dull crimson, which made of the arched vista of naked boughs a groined window more splendid than that of any cathedral. He was thinking over his late interview with Mrs. Hobbs, and in the light of it interpreting—albeit in a somewhat sober and middle-aged fashion—the look he had seen on the face of George Trimmer's shoe clerk. It was difficult for Mr. Pettibone to comprehend the position of the young Englishman, yet in spite of himself he found his sympathy going out to him, rather than to the woman.

"I cannot approve of warfare," mused Mr. Pettibone, shaking his head: "Warfare is uncivilized, degrading, even brutalizing; and yet—no woman has the right to strangle the convictions of a man."

He was still pondering these paradoxical conclusions when he arrived before the rather dilapidated cottage, bearing the brilliantly new sign of Malvina Bennett, dressmaker.

XI

OLD Mrs. Bennett opened the door in response to Mr. Pettibone's knock. She was a very small and withered old woman with bent shoulders, which appeared in some remote period of time to have absorbed the semblance of a neck.

She peered suspiciously at the minister over the rims of her old-fashioned steel spectacles.

"I guess you'd better step inside," she said. "The air drows is something terrible when the door's open."

The pent-up atmosphere within the little house appeared to be clamoring for reinforcements; in it were reminiscences of boiled vegetables, fried things, kerosene, feather beds of ancient lineage and descent, of well-conserved black clothes and old stuffed furniture, with the more insistent aroma of a chill cellar, where lingered the ghosts of vegetables, pickles, and smoked meats. Old Mrs. Bennett blinked vaguely at the tall man in the dimly lighted passage.

"Be you the sewin'-m'chine agent?" she de-

manded, in her high quavering voice. "Because if you be, Malviny says——"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Bennett," the minister interrupted in his unruffled voice. "I see you fail to remember me—I am Mr. Pettibone, pastor of the Presbyterian Church. I had the pleasure of calling upon you last winter."

"Well, that cert'nly is one on me!" crowed the old lady. . . . "Malviny! Malviny!"

The sound of a sewing-machine driven at full speed ceased at the strident call, and Miss Bennett's voice issued from the stuffy little room in the rear of the hall:

"What is it, Ma?"

"Here's the minister come t' call, 'n' I went 'n' mistook him f'r th' sewin'-m'chine agent!"

Miss Malvina, instant with apology and explanation, piloted Mr. Pettibone to the parlor, where a sofa and several chairs covered with black hair-cloth presided over a marble-topped table whose chief ornament was a symbolic cross, wrought in waxwork in the days of Miss Malvina's youth and carefully guarded from the tooth of time by a glass cover.

"Ma's eyesight ain't s' very good lately," offered Miss Malvina, "'n' my sewin'-m'chine makes sech a racket I can't hear m'self think."

"I suppose you're busy, as usual," chimed in

the minister cheerfully. He was thinking his wife must have been mistaken about the new dress-maker. Surely there should be work enough in Innisfield for both women.

"I suppose mebbe Philura—I mean Mis' Rev'-ren' Pettibone—must 'a' told you?" she said in a low tone, not meant for the ears of Ma.

"You mean——?"

Miss Malvina nodded and hitched her chair closer to the minister's.

"I've kep' it from Ma, so far. I don't want her t' git all riled up. . . . You know how 'tis with a person o' her age. . . . Course I ain't talkin' 'bout it t' most other folks, neither; but that there Madam Louise—well, I don't mind tellin' my minister she's took my cust'mers right away from me: folks I'd done fer sense they was babies."

"This is really distressing, Miss Malvina," said the minister, "and to think that all this time I have neglected—— You perhaps recall the circumstances connected with your bringing Mrs. Pettibone's—er—robe, if that is the proper term for so beautiful a garment—to the parsonage."

He had drawn the depleted roll of bills from his pocket and was gazing at Miss Bennett, his kind face puckered with distress.

The little dressmaker threw herself back in her chair with a tragic gesture of dismay.

"Ef I ain't always a-puttin' my foot in!" she exclaimed. . . . "Ma! Seems t' me I smell them turnips burnin'; put some more water in the pot, will you?"

On the heels of Mrs. Bennett's departure her daughter turned again to the minister.

"I ain't a-goin' t' take a cent for makin' that there negligee," she said positively. "Tain't much I kin do fer folks, but makin' up them light blue goods f'r Mis' Rev'ren' Pettibone was a reel pleasure, 'n' sewin' on th' lace 'n' all. I kep' a-thinkin' all th' while how perfec'ly sweet she was a-goin' t' look a-holdin' her baby up against them satin bows. . . . I hope 'n' pray he don't spile 'em."

"But my dear Miss Malvina," protested Mr. Pettibone. "Let me assure you that while we appreciate to the full your——"

"I didn't tell you everythin'," interrupted the little dressmaker. "The Lord's b'en reel good t' me, 'n' I'm 's prosp'rous an' contented 's a mouse in a cheese. I'll tell you, I jes' took th' bit in m' teeth an' went 'n' interviewed that woman——"

"You mean Mrs. Hobbs?"

Miss Malvina nodded briskly.

"She can't no more dressmake 'n' a cat c'n sing. I'm helpin' her out."

"You are helping?"

"Finishin' off 'n' like that. But I don't take no respons'bility on my shoulders for patterns; an' of all th' redic'lous—— Jest you wait tell you see Mis' Obed Salter an' Mis' Undertaker Beels a-walkin' down the center aisle a-Sunday. I'll bet you'll forget your text. . . . But there! I ought n't to 'a' spoke that-away."

Mrs. Bennett sailed into the room, her ancient nose in the air. "Nex' time you want t' git red o' me, Malviny," she said, "you don't need t' tell no lie: them turnips wa'n't even bilin'!"

Mr. Pettibone arose with haste.

"Can you—er—tell me anything concerning your new neighbors?" he asked. "I had thought of calling there."

"Well, I sh'd remark!" chirruped Miss Malvina. "I feel 's o' I know 'em intimate—what with helpin' 'em clean an' settle, an' Mad'lane runnin' in th' back door, friendly, most any minute. I'm teachin' her t' talk, so 's folks c'n understand' what she's tryin' t' say . . . I had t' laugh, first off. But she's reel bright 'n' ketches on somethin' wonderful. Her pa c'n talk pretty good, considerin' he's fur'n. Course he can't help *that*! Yes, sir; Mr. Dassay is what *I* call

a reel gent'man. 'N' outside present comp'ny, the' ain't many of 'em t' be found in this 'ere town."

Mr. Pettibone walked home quickly in the early darkness, which greeted him as he emerged upon the old familiar doorstep of the house which had sheltered the sober late blooming of his second courtship and marriage. He seldom thought of his first wife in these days; many years had elapsed since he believed his broken heart buried deep beneath the rough sod of the village churchyard. And in truth something of himself—his young manhood, his shattered dreams of future happiness, the fervent upspringing of his spirit to hers—had never risen from the chill silence which enshrouded her there. But today a look in the soft dark eyes of Madelaine Desaye, something in the graceful bend of her head as she sat modestly listening to the somewhat labored conversation between her father and himself, had brought back the vivid image of Mary. And now, as he hurried homeward, she seemed flitting by his side in the deepening twilight, as beautiful, as loving, as when in her first youth she had given herself to him.

He half put out his hand to the unsubstantial presence, then as quickly withdrew it. There was no bridging of the chasm possible. And were it

possible, he knew he would not choose to call her back. . . .

The mother of his son sat waiting for him by the study fire. There was a warm rose of welcome in her uplifted face which vanished at the touch of his cold lips.

"What has happened, Silas?" she asked quickly. "You look pale and——"

"Nothing—nothing at all, my dear Philura," he assured her. "It is damp and—er—chilly outside, and I—I believe I am a little tired. Parish visiting is never an easy task."

She watched him anxiously while they were eating their supper, and uneasily aware of her searching eyes he made a conscious effort to entertain her, telling her of Mrs. Hobbs and her English son; of the generosity of Malvina Bennett—at which she demurred—and finally of his visit to the Desayes.

She presently forgot her uneasiness in eager questions about the father and daughter, the furnishing of the house and the probable permanency of her new tenants.

"If they'll only stay all summer, Silas, we can buy the Ford runabout. You could sell the horse and buggy, and the barn will do perfectly, just as it is. It would be such a help in out of town calls, dear."

He did not deny this; and the curious sense of aloofness which she had felt like a chill mist between them gradually disappeared in the sunshine of renewed domesticity.

"That Frenchman, Desaye," he told her, "is a most interesting person. It seems he is a native of Alsace, and at the outbreak of the war, fearing reprisals from his German neighbors, with whom he had never been on the best of terms, he decided—wisely or unwisely—to come to America. They have some small means, I should say. But whether they will remain in Innisfield or not depends wholly upon circumstances."

"You mean whether they like it here or not?" she inquired.

"Precisely, my dear. And that, as the boys say, 'is up to us'."

He still seemed struggling with some unknown depression, difficult to shake off. Her eyes timidly questioned his, but without response.

"Then they are not Catholics?"

He shook his head.

"Such religion as they have bears no theological brand," he said dryly.

"And you're quite sure you feel well, Silas?"

He arose from the supper-table with his usual dignified deliberation.

"My dear Philura," he said, "Why will you

persist in supposing me ill? Isn't it one of your bed-rock principles to — er — *think health?* ”

She lowered her eyes.

“ Yes, Silas,” she said meekly.

He worked diligently in his study that evening, covering uncounted large pages with a dissertation on the life and labors of Saint Paul, garnered from the shelves of his library and the recesses of his own well-stored mind. It was past eleven o'clock when he finally placed the cap-sheaf of a triumphant martyrdom on the apostolic career. The house was very quiet, so quiet that the soft thud of snow against the window was distinctly audible. He arose, crossed the floor noiselessly in his slippered feet and looked out. All semblance of spring had vanished in the whirling drift; it might have been January, and yet it was April, and all this show and bluster of winter must shortly disappear before the advancing sun. Half against his will, his thoughts reverted once more to the revery of the early evening and his subsequent discomfiture under the blue eyes of Philura. Was it a species of infidelity to her to return to his lost Mary—even in memory? He swept his hand across his tired eyes. Life was a strange, long journey, at best, and one must travel it, for the most part, alone, with only thoughts

—unseen, unknown, and often unbidden—for company.

A faint, wailing cry from above roused him. Then the sound of her gentle foot on the floor. Was the response of the Infinite Affection as sure?

XII

IF Etienne Desaye had ever regretted his hastily formed decision to immigrate to America he never confessed it to his daughter Madeleine. He had likewise refrained from telling her what unspeakable things he feared in the land of their nativity. He contented himself with praising America. It was a safe place, he declared, for persons like themselves, being far removed from the tumult and dangers of war and withal hospitable to strangers. One might have supposed from listening to the worthy gentleman's dissertations on the land of his adoption that the splendid song of the Nativity had been composed and rendered by angelic choirs solely—or at least chiefly—for the town of Boston. It was here that the wanderers first found refuge, and where for a matter of six months they remained, living in a dark, illy-ventilated flat in South Boston, a locality which was—they discovered shortly—as different as could be well imagined from any city, town, or village of France. Rents were high, provisions of an unthinkable expense, and service impossible to procure. It was during these initial

weeks that Madeleine, a mere child up to this time, became the practical woman of affairs. She learned to market and to cook, and the touch of her light hand kept all things clean and well ordered—or so it seemed to her father, who knew nothing of the hours his child spent in noiseless dusting and polishing while he slept, rousing for his chocolate, when Madeleine brought it steaming to his bedside.

In the first days of spring, when bunches of wilted violets and the rarer arbutus began to be hawked about the streets the girl begged for the country.

"This American town is very ugly, *mon père*," she said piteously; "and in the summer this apartment will be too warm under its roof of tin. Think also of a street named *Milk!*"

M. Desaye raised abstracted eyes from the book in which he had buried his regrets.

"You wish again to remove?" he inquired mildly; "but where? Do you not find these rooms sufficiently commodious? It is true that the town is ugly; but what would you? We are far from France."

He shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

Madeleine explained.

Even in America one might find trees and grass, of a sort, she stated. There were also small cot-

tages, where one might dwell, in localities where eggs and vegetables could be procured of an indubitable freshness. Her young eyes were eager, her cheeks flushed with hope.

It is probable that M. Desaye would have continued to occupy the dreary little flat in South Boston without thought of change, since in the privacy of his own mind he had already condemned America—and in particular Boston—as a most undesirable place of residence. He had made a mistake, he told himself, to be somehow endured till the war was at an end. He would then return to France, settle in some unmolested village, where in good time he would arrange a suitable marriage for his daughter. During the months—or years—which must necessarily elapse before this desirable *dénouement*, he had his beloved books, and for the rest little mattered. But he was a good father, mindful—when not too absorbed in his literary pursuits—of his motherless child. So the brief conversation resulted in various pilgrimages to more or less ugly suburbs—where the rents were of a highness! And finally, by the merest chance to a town further away, amid real trees and fields, with country roads and farms not far distant. Here was a vacant house, with the sun looking in through its small-paned windows; here also were shade-trees, shrubs,

plenty of space for flowers in beds and borders, and best of all an indubitable apple-tree with promise of abundant fruitage already visible on its gnarled boughs.

Here Madeleine, a fresher rose blooming in her cheeks, was presently singing about her work, which appeared less irksome than in the ugly city rooms. And here also, M. Desaye, once more content, resigned himself to the narcotic soothing of his books, satisfied that when the proper time arrived for the marriage of Madeleine the dove of peace would be brooding his distracted country. He even permitted himself to hope that his beloved Alsace might be restored to France, with all her drooping lilies freshened into new beauty. But of this soaring aspiration he said nothing, bitterly realizing the Teuton prowess. Even in American towns and villages one's eyes and ears were constantly assailed by uncouth German names and the dissonant speech of the foe. But what would you? It was always possible to avoid such persons—"Cochons!" M. Desaye characterized them under indignant breath—which epithet as a matter of course, is to be metaphorically interpreted. As for the Americans—as it pleased the English-speaking inhabitants of this crude, almost barbaric country to call themselves—one might spend a not unprofitable period in studying their

strange customs. To this end M. Desaye applied himself with some diligence to the mastery of the English tongue.

It was a *bête* of a language, being entirely lacking in the facile grace of the French; but again, what would you? The few—the very few persons he had met in America who professed to speak his own language accomplished such excruciating torture of his sensitive ears that he begged them almost with tears to desist. “Your pardon, Madame (or Monsieur)”—as the case might be—“but I will spik to you *l’Anglais*,” he would say with dignity. There was a certain fat, blank book reposing in M. Desaye’s *escritoire* in which from time to time he wrote in careful French his impressions of “The Natives of America.” Somewhere in the back of his brain lurked the secret aspiration of one day achieving a literary reputation; and why not begin with these deliberate and profound studies of foreign life, as he was now beholding it?

Miss Malvina Bennett was very far from realizing the sort of interest she had aroused in her neighbor. But she found a new zest in living as the spring advanced and the yard next door began to bud and blossom under the intelligent care of the Desayes. It was pleasant to sit by her low window-sill, which afforded a convenient resting-

place for spools, buttons, and other properties of her trade, and likewise commanded a sweeping view of the neighboring garden and front porch.

"He's a-settin' out on the stoop this mornin', with his book, es usual," she would tell her mother. "An' Mad'lane's got her dish-towels spread on th' barb'ry bush t' dry. Now she's diggin' her posies; did y' ever see the beat o' them two?"

And Ma Bennett would draw her far-seeing specs over her faded eyes and gaze and gaze at the spectacle of M. Desaye in a frogged velvet coat, slowly turning the pages of his book, and of the light figure of the girl coming and going in her pink cotton frock.

"Land, Malviny!" she would say, "ef he ain't started up t' come over here ag'in. What in creation c'n he want this time o' day?"

Not being in the secret of the fat blank book, which by now boasted several pages covered with exquisite script recording the writer's impressions of "*Une Couturière d'Amérique*," Miss Malvina could only speculate vaguely as to the motives which brought her neighbor so frequently to her door. After one or two occasions devoted to ceremonial interviews in the hair-cloth parlor, Miss Malvina decided not "t' make comp'ny" of the gentleman from foreign parts.

"'Tain't as if he was a reg'lar *man*," she told Ma; "he's 's differ'nt from th' men-folks 'round here 's chalk is from cheese."

Having arrived at this sagacious conclusion, Miss Malvina fell into the easy habit of permitting M. Desaye and his daughter the freedom of the kitchen, where she kept her sewing-machine during the months when fire was a necessity.

"Set right down in th' rockin'-cheer," she would say hospitably. "I c'n stitch up this 'ere seam in two jerks of a lamb's tail, then we c'n talk."

On a radiant afternoon in early May behold them thus: Miss Malvina industriously binding the seams of a "robe" destined to enhance the fading charms of Mrs. Obed Salter; Ma sleepily knitting, while the cat played with her ball of yarn under the table, and M. Desaye paying diligent heed to the little dressmaker's fluent conversation. After various unsuccessful attempts to master her frequent and remarkable figures of speech M. Desaye had concluded that English was a vastly more malleable language than he had at first supposed it. He now resorted to the Socratic method:

"Mees Malvina," he observed blandly, "I 'ave hear you spik of two jerk of ze tail of ze lamb. I have in my *dictionnaire* earnestly sought zose

words; but as yet I do not comprehend' ze meaning. You will of your kin'ness tell me if I also s'ould spik zose words, and on what occasion?"

Miss Bennett gazed pityingly at her visitor. He was a personable figure of a man, though regretably foreign in his appearance. Even his garments, though well-fitting and of fine material, did not in the least resemble American store clothes. His eyes, very dark and keen, appeared to emit occasional sparkles of disconcerting mirth.

Miss Malvina sniffed tentatively.

"I don' know as I ever give th' subjec' any earnest consid'ration," she said thoughtfully. "You ain't obliged t' say it: but 'twon't hurt you none t' learn t' talk like civilized folks."

"*Voilà!*" he exclaimed eagerly; "zat is w'at I wish—to spik quite correct. You will teach me—eh?"

He smiled engagingly, the corners of his upturned mustache lending an agreeable emphasis to his words.

"I s'all learn—*n'est-ce-pas?* in one—two jerk of a lamb-tail—eh? . . . Do I say *exactement?*"

Miss Malvina cackled.

"You cert'nly do beat th' Dutch!" she exclaimed. "But you might's well leave the pa an' ma off your remarks. . . . Mebbe I'd better turn to an' learn French; I says t' Mad'lane yiste'day,

'*Bong swore*,' I says, jest like that. You'd ought t' 'a' heard her laugh."

M. Desaye looked pained.

"My daughter is young—*excessivement*—an' w'at you call foolish," he said.

He shook his head:

"Do not, I beg, attempt to spik our language. It ees too——"

"Oh, 'tain't so bad as I thought, first off," interrupted Miss Malvina kindly. "I'll bet I'll be parly-vooin' 's well 's th' next one, b'fore you know it. 'T would be kind o' fun, I think. Me an' Mad'lane's gittin' long first-rate. I'm learnin' her, so 't she'll be up t' snuff in no time."

"Up-t-snuff," repeated M. Desage. "What ees zat word mos' *intéressant*?"

Miss Malvina, two pins firmly clenched between her teeth, paused to survey a twisting seam.

"Up t' snuff means what *you ain't*," she said cruelly. . . . But there! I guess that wa'n't s' very nice o' me—seein' you ain't in no ways t' blame f'r bein' French. . . . Ef th' truth was knowed, mebbe that's jest what ails Mis' Hobbs: a-tryin' t' be fur'n when she ain't. Ef I couldn't do no better 'n that on a dress-waist, I'd eat my best bunnit!"

"It ees *idiôme*!—*n'est-ce-pas*?—'Eat my bes'

bunnit?' All *idiôme!*—I sink. Ah, vary great of interes'—*oui!*"

He wrote briskly in a leather-covered memorandum book, while Miss Malvina bent her mind upon the intricate problem of the misshapen seam.

"Malviny," said Ma Bennett, who had suddenly come to life in the act of rescuing her ball of yarn from the cat, "I see Mad'lane out there talkin' t' a young man over th' fence. . . . Looks t' me like Harry Schwartz."

"Yes; 'tis," confirmed Miss Malvina placidly. "Well, Harry's a reel nice young feller, an' his folks has got money; I'd like t' see Mad'lane with a likely beau. She's a good girl 'n' pretty 's a pink."

M. Desaye darted an inquiring look toward his own *ménage*. Then he arose, restored the memorandum book to his pocket without apparent haste and approached Ma Bennett, as was his invariable procedure on arrival and departure.

"*Madame*," said he, heels together, hand over his heart, "*mes compliments!* I am *excessive-ment* oblige for your *hospitalité*."

"Land sakes! don't mention it!" protested Ma.

No one, as far as she could remember, had ever paid her the slightest deference. It gave her an

added sense of self-importance which she found singularly agreeable.

"*Permettez moi,*" continued the Frenchman, still more politely, as he restored the disputed ball of yarn to its lawful owner.

Miss Malvina dropped her work in her lap and with a subdued sparkle under her lids awaited her own particular leave-taking. It was customarily not less ceremonial than that accorded to Ma, but with a barely perceptible shade of difference—an added savor of esteem, apparent to Miss Malvina alone. Today, to her surprise, M. Desaye retreated nimbly toward the door:

"Mees Malvina, *adieu!*—my t'anks, my compliment!" was all he said, as he backed out of the door, in perfect form.

"Well, *did* you ever!" sniffed the little dress-maker, visibly dismayed.

"Seems like he's in a hurry," observed Ma sagaciously. "Mebbe he's got his eye on Mad'lane's beau; an' then ag'in, mebbe's he's mad at somethin' er other. I wouldn't git too f'miliar with a fur'ner, ef I was you, Malviny. They ain't t' be trusted."

But Miss Malvina's sewing-machine opposed a noisy whirl of defiance to Ma's unfounded opinions.

XIII

MADELEINE DESAYE, in her pink cotton gown the color of a rose—a rare tint which appeared to be reflected more richly in her glowing face—was still talking—or was it merely listening?—to the tall young man on the further side of the fence, when M. Desaye, with no undue appearance of haste, joined his daughter. One might have supposed he had at that moment first perceived the stalwart person of the intruder, so genuine and unaffected was his surprise.

“Monsieur,” he murmured gently, “possess ze *avantage*—is it not? I have not ze *plaisir*—*non?*”

The girl turned quickly, and in the act a wave of crimson submerged the warm rose of her cheek.

“Oh!” she breathed, quite—and yet not quite as an American girl would have spoken the small word signifying surprise and pleasure—or was it merely dismay?

The young man’s head was bare and the wind

blew his curly brown hair about his blue eyes, which were frankly occupied with the girl to the exclusion of all else. But at the tactful interruption—meant without doubt to hold a shade of reproof—he glanced up.

“Your father?” he asked cheerfully. “Glad to know you, sir. I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Desaye some weeks ago. . . . Perhaps she told you of the spill.”

“Of ze—s-s-pill?” echoed the older man, still bland but unsmiling. “I fear I do not un’erstan’. Ze word ees not familiar. An’ you——?”

He turned to his daughter.

“You have not introduce, my Madeleine. W’ere, *par example*, ees your *civilité*?”

His playful manner took all sting from his words—or so young Harry Schwartz was thinking. He was therefore quite unprepared for what followed:

“Permit me to present—to—to my fat’er—M’sieu’—*M’sieu’ Henri Le Noir*,” she said breathlessly, and flashed a pleading glance at the partner of her late adventure.

“A-a-ah!”

M. Desaye’s voice held quick relief, undisguised satisfaction, mingled with cautious reserve—but the sort of reserve which is ready to melt into complete cordiality.

"A *compatriote*—eh? . . . *Monsieur*, I grasp your hand with great pleasure!"

Harry Schwartz understood and took instant advantage of the proffered hand; the rapidly spoken French phrase troubled him. He shook his head regretfully. "I didn't learn much French in school," he acknowledged.

"*Voilà!* You aire Americaine born, I perceive."

M. Desaye's tone expressed keen regret:

"But, my frien', you s'ould learn ze language *héréditaire*. Eet ees great pitie, such ignorant. Forgive, eef I spik wizout disguise of sentiment."

The young man drew his frank brows together in a puzzled frown. He was trying, with small success, to comprehend not merely M. Desaye's halting English, but the singular sea-change which had come over his own honest name. Why had Madeleine (he already thought of her as Madeleine) called him *Le Noir*? In the meantime it appeared necessary to say the right thing—if one could by any means be sure of it—to this insistent person in the frogged velvet coat.

"I'm awfully sorry I'm such an ignoramus," he blurted out. "But I guess I could make a stab at French if I put my mind to it. I wish I—— Couldn't you teach me, sir! I'd study like a nailer. I vow I would!"

It was a credit to M. Desaye's quick wits, as well as to his recent studies in the singular English idioms, that he grasped the import of this speech. His grave face brightened.

"I am not professor of French language an' literature," he stated with dignity. "Still to oblige a *compatriote*—who will, *sans doute*, acquire his own language with ease—I s'all have ze mos' great *plaisir*. You will begin—*immédiatement, n'est-ce-pas?* I will cause you to forget ze fac' *lamentable* zat you aire born Americanine."

"Oh, I say," murmured the astonished recipient of this magnificent offer. "You are a lot too good, sir; but I'm afraid I——"

He stole a look at the girl. She was apparently intent upon the spray of lilac bloom she was slowly denuding of its florets. Upon the melting rose of her cheek the dark lashes cast a distracting shadow; about the corners of her mouth an elusive dimple came and went.

"If you think I could learn, sir. I was never any good at Latin——"

"*Certainement!*" cried M. Desaye, with some impatience. "Not for nossing have you ze *sang-froid* to spik to my daughter. *Allons!* I now present to you book. You s'all also learn many sings mos' *nécessaire* for polite."

He held the gate wide and Harry Schwartz entered, his brow still corrugated with unaccustomed thought. Madeleine raised her eyes for an instant. But she did not smile. He even thought he detected a shade of displeasure in the look she bent upon him, as he lingered behind the impetuous Frenchman, who had dashed into the house in quest of the initial medium of instruction.

"What's the matter with my name?" he inquired. "Did you forget it?"

She surveyed him disdainfully from under her lashes.

"*Stupide!*" she murmured. "Not for you do I your so ogly name transfer to more beautiful *Français*. But for my fat'er, who ha-ate—detes' such German word. You un'erstan'—*oui?* Nevaire do I again spik to you, if you——"

"You bet I won't!" he promised eagerly. "I'm not so slow. I get you O.K. But say—— You won't mind if I take your father up on that proposition, will you? I—I'm keen to learn French. Always wanted to; honest Injun, I'll study evenings, an'——"

Madeleine smiled inscrutably.

"Also, I learn to spik Englis'," she said. "Vary queek I learn: Mees Malvina teach me many sings in two jerk of lam'-tail. You see!"

"You mean the old maid dressmaker next door?" he asked incredulously. "Is *she* teaching you English?"

Madeleine nodded.

"*Mon père, aussi.* We are mos' interes'. We study *idiôme*—like 'you eat my bes' bonnet.' . . . *Mon Dieu!* me—I fin' your Englis' not *gentil*, but mos'—*risible*—w'at you call fon-ny. I bet dollaire I learn more queek zan you! my star-alive, yes!"

"You sure are making some progress," agreed the young man cheerfully. "But I can teach you, too. I'll bet I can knock the spots out of Miss Malvina, when it comes to idioms. I know 'em all."

"You knock ze s-spots of Mees Malvina? Eet ees mos' rude—knock."

"Knock the spots is an idiom; it means—er—I can lay all over Miss Malvina, when it comes to teaching you good plain American. I can beat her hollow . . . or beat her to a frazzle—means the same thing. . . . She's old-fashioned."

"Ol' fashion'?"

"Yes; behind the times—not up-to-date. You want to hitch your wagon to a star—that's me!"

And young Harry Schwartz grinned audaciously.

"We also have *idiôme*," she informed him.

"You s'all see. . . . But *mon père* has discover book of learning. He is not glad for me talk to you."

"Why not? I flattered myself your father cottoned to me."

She swept him a quaint curtsy.

"Goo'-by! I make myself of a sudden scurse, like teeth of hen. Queek absent—— You un'erstan'?"

"By the living Jingo!" mused Harry Schwartz, as he walked away ten minutes later, a copy of Fénelon's *Telemachus* under his arm,—
"if she isn't a perfect peach! . . . Is little Ongree in luck? You can just bet he is!"

And he tossed M. Desaye's treasured Fénelon into the air and caught it again, to the imminent peril of its old-world binding.

XIV.

MRS. WESSELLS, her face drawn into myriad puckers of protest, stripped the suds from her red fingers and straightened her long, lank back which appeared more or less permanently bowed by much stooping over laundry tubs.

"You ain't never a-goin' t' take that there baby out t'day, in all this sun an' wind, be you?" she inquired.

Mrs. Pettibone repeated her statement to that effect, adding a request that Mrs. Wessells should assist in lowering the baby-carriage down the parsonage front steps.

Mrs. Wessells gazed searchingly at the minister's wife.

"Say, the's one thing I'd like t' know, first off: Was that baby took up t' th' attic b'fore you brought him downstairs?"

"Why, of course not," replied Mrs. Pettibone, with some impatience. "Why should the baby be taken to the attic?"

"I might 'a' knowed she wouldn't 'a' took the trouble," mourned Mrs. Wessells, rolling up her

eyes to the ceiling. "I'd ought t' 'a' tended t' that m'self b'fore 'twas too late—what with you on th' flat o' your back an' Mr. Pettibone likely never knowin' nothin', no more'n th' child. That nurse from Boston was 'nough t' make a body fergit t' say their pray'rs—let alone lookin' after other folk's children. 'S I says t' Wessells, 'That dratted woman,' I says, 'is what I call th' livin' limit.' I hed all I c'd do t' stomick her sass. An' I wouldn't 'ave neither, ef it hadn't 'a' be'n fer you a-layin' upstairs on your dyin' bed——"

"But I didn't die," protested Mrs. Pettibone. "I'm alive and well, and so is Baby. He's gained half a pound this week, Louisa."

"You don't say! Well, I s'pose 'twon't hurt none t' tell you *now*; but I never looked t' see you 'round this 'ere kitchen agin. 'S I says t' Wessells, 'Poor Mr. Pettibone's a-goin' t' git b'reaved a secon' time,' I says. 'But where there's a secon' th'll gen'ally be a third,' I says. They kind o' git th' habit—not that it's a bad one, what with widows an' ol' maids a-plenty. I guess you know how that is yourself, 'm."

"What about taking the baby to the attic?" tactfully interrupted the second Mrs. Pettibone.

"Oh, I guess you ain't lived all these years without knowin' that sign. . . . You haven't

heard it—eh? Well, I want t' know! Course it's too late f'r that baby o' yourn *now*; but in case th' was ever another—you got t' take 'em upstairs *b'fore* you take 'em down, 'r else they'll come down in th' world, 'stead o' risin'. I rec'lect we didn't have no attic t' th' house where most o' my childern was born; but I says t' Wessells, 'You c'n take 'em up t' th' roof,' I says. . . . Yes, *ma'am!* Ketch me a-n'glectin' my childern! . . . Wessells kind hated t' try it, but I says t' 'im, 'You git th' ladder,' I says, 'an' set it right b' my winder,' I says. 'N' I'll han' Georgie out 's you go a-past. I borned this 'ere baby,' I says, 'n' it's your part t' see to it he gits ahead in th' world.' . . . 'Suppose I sh'd drop 'im?' says Wessells. 'Don't you das,' I says. 'I'm boun' an' de-termined t' have our Georgie go up in th' world,' I says. . . . 'N' jest on account o' that, th' ain't a smarter boy in this 'ere town 'n my Georgie. I ain't a-goin' t' be s'prised t' see him Pres'dent some o' these days. I bet th' time was when The'dore Roos'velt an' Woodrow Wilson was jest th' same age 's my Georgie, 'n' wore their knee-pants an' like that, an' hed t' learn th' differ'nce b'tween eight times seven and six times nine—ef th' is one. Georgie says th' is. My! he's th' knowin'est boy! "

"Now if you'll help me lift the baby-carriage

down the steps," interrupted little Mrs. Pettibone.

"Did that critter from Boston tell you a stray dog come along an' dug a hole right in under your bedroom winder th' very nex' day after he was born?" demanded Mrs. Wessells.

But Mrs. Pettibone pretended not to hear, being already embarked upon her first proud maternal pilgrimage, pushing the perambulator, which seemed to have grown surprisingly heavy during its long sojourn in the attic.

"Yes'm, 'twas a yeller dog I never seen b'fore; he run right in th' yard where I was hangin' out m' dish-towels an' I drove 'im off," came Mrs. Wessell's pursuing voice. "But he come right back, an' th' nex' thing I knowed—when I stepped out to throw some p'tato peels in th' swill-pail—there he was 's large 's life settin' b' th' edge of a grave he'd dug 'n' howlin' t' beat the cars! I never knowed it t' fail, Mis' Pettibone—inside of a year, anyhow! So if anythin' happens t' th' baby, r'member you got your warnin'!"

The last words borne on the warm May wind reached Mrs. Pettibone's ears like a hateful echo of her own thoughts. She stooped to tuck the blankets more snugly about the sleeping child.

"I'm not afraid," she said to herself; "I'm

not going to think about losing him. Just because I love him so doesn't mean that God will take him away. God isn't like that!"

At family prayers that morning—a function which had been resumed as soon as she was able to come downstairs—she had listened to her husband's voice reading the decalogue. Of course she had known the commandments ever since she could remember; but one phrase had sounded insistently in her ears while she bathed and dressed the baby: "For I the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God!" Suppose it should be true?

After the baby had lapsed into rosy slumber she tucked him into his carriage and pattered softly away to her Mecca: before the door of Mr. Pettibone's study she paused uncertainly. He would be busy writing his Sunday sermon, she knew, and there was to be a funeral at eleven.

He looked up abstractedly as she timidly opened the door.

"Ah, my dear! What is it?"

"I wanted to—to ask you something," she faltered. "It will take only a minute."

"And you couldn't wait for that minute? Then it must be something important," he inferred.

He held out his hand to her kindly.

"It is important—to me; and, yes, to you—and the baby."

"Well?"

He surveyed her thoughtfully. This small woman, who had once seemed a wholly negligible personality to most people in Innisfield, including himself, had latterly grown to be of paramount interest to many persons, and more—nay, most particularly—to himself. She had become his second wife; she was rapidly becoming his second self. He recognized that self in the question she tremulously put to him:

"Why is God *jealous*?"

He tapped his paper thoughtfully with his pencil—Mr. Pettibone preferred a pencil with an eraser for composition. The eraser gave one a pleasant sense of freedom; it appeared to make written thoughts more easily malleable, like clay in the hands of the sculptor. Thought, advanced to the dignity of ink; then to type (which may yet be changed) then to the inviolable plate, approaches the fixed state of marble—when what is made is made, be it good or ill.

"You are thinking," he said, "of the decalogue I read this morning."

"Yes," she breathed. "And afterward I was—afraid. I am too happy, perhaps. And if God——"

"My dear Philura," he said gravely, "it is a seemingly unfortunate characteristic of the human mind that our highest convictions, our most illumined aspirations seldom remain in a fixed state. We attain the heights, only to slip back again into the depths whence we have so hopefully emerged but a little while before. Go back in your experience, my dear, and recall the days when you found that God was kind and even lavishly generous—in the matter of gowns and—er—husbands."

There was a glint of humor in the eyes he lifted to hers, but with it appeared a shadow of real anxiety.

"Don't fail me, my dear," he went on, still more seriously; "I shall continue to have need of your optimism and your strong faith. As to the word 'jealous'; it is perhaps unfortunately translated. There is no hint there of the cruel suspicion we mortals call jealousy. Say rather 'vigilant' or 'watchful.' 'I, the Lord thy God, am a *vigilant* God.' . . . You are quite right in being happy—if you are happy."

His eyes questioned her keenly.

"Oh, I am—I am!" she cried, clasping her hands passionately.

"And yet your lot in life is not an easy one," he sighed.

"If one could only be rid—once and for all—of being afraid," she said, after a longish pause.

"I believe we shall, some time or other," he murmured abstractedly. "Fear has come up with us from the jungle of creation; it pads—pads after us, like a velvet-footed beast in the dark. But the beasts will all be put under our feet—once we emerge into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."

His pencil once more began to move rapidly over the paper. He had forgotten her presence; perceiving which she slipped away to the kitchen, where Mrs. Wessells, after a third heartening cup of tea, had resumed a belated washing.

"I don't see how people can *live* who are always thinking and talking of bad *signs*," said Mrs. Pettibone to herself, as she once more put the perambulator in motion.

She blushed, as she recalled her own unreasoning anxiety to glimpse the new moon over her right shoulder.

"Yes; and I prefer to pick up a pin with its head towards me, and I cried once, when I broke a looking-glass—and mother did die that same year; but of course it wasn't the looking-glass. And now—just because a yellow dog—I am ashamed—ashamed to be so silly. Our God is

vigilant—a *vigilant God*. I must remember that! In Him I live and move and have my being. I mustn't forget, even for a minute."

She stopped first at the butcher's for a modest purchase, receiving with smiles and blushes the heartfelt congratulations of that worthy purveyor of flesh foods.

"It cert'nly does seem good t' see you out with that little market-wagon o' yourn once more," said Mr. Kelly, as he cut and trimmed the three lamb-chops she had ordered, with scrupulous care. His rotund person and broad red face appeared to radiate hearty good will as he handed the small neat parcel to Mrs. Pettibone, who tucked it carefully under the blankets.

"I s'pose I c'n take a peek—eh? . . . My! My! What a fine fat baby! Goin' t' look exac'ly like th' dominie; ain't it?"

Mrs. Pettibone fervently hoped so.

"Whatever become of th' other little chap?" pursued Mr. Kelly. . . . "Say, that was tough—his folks takin' him away, after you an' th' dominie 'd put yourselves out the way you done t' raise him."

"Stephen is well," said Mrs. Pettibone, her bright face clouding a little. "I had a letter from Mrs. Maitland only the other day. They are living in Chicago, you know."

She patted the blue-and-white coverlid which had once brooded another treasure.

"We felt it was right his parents should have him," she said. "But I—we—— It was like losing a child—when they took him."

"I'll bet it was!" agreed Mr. Kelly warmly. "He was a fine little chap an' no mistake. . . . Well, I guess now you got one o' your own you'll never miss him."

Philura Pettibone allowed the statement to pass unchallenged. It was merely an echo of a widespread parochial opinion. Mrs. Buckthorn, indeed, had congratulated her upon the loss of her adopted child: "A smilin' providence," she called it, adding: "You'd ought t' be glad an' thankful *that* child's pro-vided for, Philura." . . . But Mrs. Pettibone could not help picturing to herself the beautiful little figure of Stephen—as he looked in the photograph his mother had sent her. He would be large enough by now to trot along beside the perambulator. But the Lord our God was a vigilant God, and He had seen to it that Stephen was restored to his young mother. . . .

XV

AT this point in her somewhat pensive meditations Mrs. Pettibone found herself in front of Trimmer's store, which put her in mind of the pale blue slippers also tucked under the blankets. They had not, after all, proved to be the right size. Several baby carriages, exuding woolly blankets, stood in front of the Emporium. The mothers presumably were shopping inside. It was a lax maternal practice strongly disapproved by Mrs. Pettibone. What if a baby should wake up and cry? What if he should fall out of his carriage? What if—half a hundred things, including runaway horses, kidnappers, and mad dogs. Still, there was Mrs. Puffer's shabby perambulator with the latest pink-and-white Puffer fast asleep and wholly unguarded. Mrs. Pettibone wondered if she might add her treasure to the group—if only for the moment required to exchange size three for size four in a pale blue felt slipper adorned with pompons. . . .

Mr. Pettibone had told his wife with considerable detail of the gloomy young English-

man, lured to America and despised immunity by the unprincipled arts of his mother. It appeared that Mr. Pettibone strongly disapproved of Mrs. Hobbs' methods of securing safety for her son. "A man," he stated forensically, "should be permitted to decide such questions for himself without female interference."

Mrs. Pettibone differed widely from her husband's conclusions. She hugged her baby to her breast with that air of complete ownership the minister had frequently observed in the matrons of his flock.

"I would never, never let them take my baby away from me to shoot at," she said passionately. "And I wouldn't let them have you, either!"

"Let us suppose," suggested Mr. Pettibone, "merely for the sake of argument, my dear, that *every* woman should take that stand. What then would become of our vaunted patriotism?"

Mrs. Pettibone didn't know, she was sure. She considered the question in mutinous silence, while her husband went to some pains to explain how this supreme test of the universal application put everything in its true light and solved the most puzzling questions.

"Women," he concluded somewhat grandiosely, "are always too prone to take the limited, personal view, whereas men——"

"Well, anyway," interrupted his wife, tucking up the baby's feet a little more snugly, "if all the women did it, there couldn't be any war."

"If the women—er——"

"If all the women took all their boys—and their husbands away—like that Mrs. Hobbs—all the English and Germans and French, you know; then the Kings and Kaisers and Czars and Emperors would be obliged to go into the trenches themselves and——"

"My *dear* Philura," protested the minister warmly. "You are talking the merest nonsense!"

"I'm only making it universal," she persisted demurely. "If there *weren't* any men to shoot and be shot at, then the Kaisers and——"

He arose abruptly, glancing at his watch.

"We are wasting time," he stated, with some asperity.

She heard the study door close firmly behind him.

"I don't care," she said to herself; "I'd like to see them shooting at each other."

Then she laid a pink blanket over the white one and deposited the woolly chrysalis thus formed under a blue slumber robe in the crib, cooing in an absurd little monotone:

"Nas'y ol' Kings 'n' Kaisers 'n' sings! Muzzer

would just *love* t' see 'em right down in a deep, deep muddy trench, so she would. They never s'all get muzzer's lamb! . . ."

A vague reminiscence of the foregoing discussion recurred to her now as she made her way toward the shoe department, where a tall young man, with a dark wave of hair drooping over his forehead, was counting change into the hand of a small girl, in a red tam. He had white, even teeth—she observed this when he smiled at the little girl—square military shoulders, and clear gray eyes under strongly marked brows. This could be no other than Horatio Herbert Kitchener Hobbs.

"He's very good-looking," she decided. "If I had been Mrs. Hobbs I'm sure I should have done exactly——"

Then she launched into a somewhat breathless explanation of her errand, as the salvaged Briton turned to give her his undivided attention. Perhaps Mr. Hobbs would remember a gentleman—a tall gentleman with gray hair; Mr. Pettibone, in short, purchasing a pair of pale blue slippers——

Mr. Hobbs recalled the circumstances perfectly. The gentleman had been obliged to guess at the size. . . . Yes, he had rather expected the return of those slippers. And would Mrs. Petti-

bone—if, peradventure, he was speaking to Mrs. Pettibone——?

Mindful of her proud estate as the wife of a clergyman, Mrs. Pettibone held out a timid hand of greeting. After a moment of puzzled indecision the young man took it.

“You are very good,” he murmured, an ingenuous blush enhancing his youthful good looks.

“Mr. Pettibone told me all about you,” beamed Mrs. Pettibone graciously. “And I mean to go and see your mother, just as soon as I can leave the baby. . . . And that reminds me, I must hurry.”

The young man turned from an inspection of a row of boxes; his spine appeared to have stiffened.

“I’m afraid we haven’t that style of slipper in light blue,” he said coldly. “Wouldn’t—er—pink do?—or black?”

“And would you mind bringing them out to me?” asked Mrs. Pettibone in an agitated voice,—“the black will do. Yes, size four, please.”

He caught something further about “the carriage outside,” and turned to see the small lady in gray hurrying toward the door. As he stood, still hesitating, he heard a sharp cough at his

elbow and looked down to find his employer, gazing at him with the air of alert suspicion Mr. Trimmer affected toward his clerks.

"Well, Hobbs," said Mr. Trimmer sharply, "any sales this morning? . . . What did Mrs. Pettibone want in this department—eh? I saw her talking to you."

"She wished to exchange some slippers, sir," replied young Hobbs, rather sulkily. "She asked me to bring them out to her carriage."

He had conceived a violent and wholly unreasoning dislike for the pompous, fussy little man, who did not appear in the least to realize that he was merely a haberdasher. The exiled Englishman gazed coldly over the top of Mr. Trimmer's shining bald head, a mighty wave of passionate affection for his own country (where tradespeople realized their true position) mingled with futile anger at his own inglorious fate submerging him so completely that he scarcely heard that gentleman's grumbled comments. He understood vaguely that he was to fetch the slippers out to Mrs. Pettibone's carriage. . . .

But no carriage was visible when he arrived at the curb. He stood for a moment in the sunlight, his comely head bare, his eyes searching the dull street. Then all at once Fate in the guise of a small and disreputable yellow dog ran between

his legs, almost upsetting him. Just how it came to pass the young Englishman never attempted to explain—even in the seclusion of his own thoughts; but he presently found himself in full pursuit of a girl in a pink dress, who fled before him down the street—the yellow dog well to the fore, a small brown paper parcel dangling from his jaws.

A woman's dismayed voice had called "Catch him! Catch him!" Then some one had laughed—a fresh, joyous sound—and Kitchener Hobbs instantly joined the chase, his spirits expanding, shaking off the dull load which had harassed him. Neither the yellow dog nor the girl in pink—who managed to maintain her lead for some distance—appeared to him to be the goal. It was rather the joy of swift motion, the long suppressed sense of power which sprang suddenly to full height, like a grinning and triumphant Jack-in-the-box. He could have run on and on; but the yellow dog foolishly paused for a moment to sniff his booty, and in that moment the girl alertly pounced upon the disputed parcel.

"*Méchant!*" she cried. "*Petit larron!* Qweek! begone or I beat you!"

The yellow dog, his diminutive tail between his legs, slunk hurriedly away, turning eyes so expressive of pained disappointment upon the girl

that she laughed aloud—the fresh joyous sound he had heard before.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to speak to her, and equally inevitable for her to smile up at him as she replied. The quiet street might have been a meadow in Arcadia, so far removed seemed these two from the stupid conventions of the world. Even the yellow dog, after a brief period devoted to sagacious reconnoissance from behind a bush, turned and trotted wistfully after them.

“My word!” said young Hobbs admiringly, “how you can run! And you caught the thief just in time. . . . Was it anything valuable?”

“Me—I am not aware,” she smiled up at him. “*Voilà!* I behold zis so bad animal about to devour ze *petit enfant! mais non*; it was only zis—conceal under robe of *bébé*.”

She held out for his inspection the minister's modest dinner, still secure in its brown paper wrappings.

He was gazing down at her with entire absence of curiosity as to the contents of Mrs. Pettibone's salvaged property. . . . They were walking slowly, very slowly, as was natural after their late exertions in the chase. There was something vaguely familiar—or so he was thinking—in her piquant face. It was like recovering a memory,

infinitely precious and only vaguely missed for an indefinite period.

"Were you ever in London?" he asked suddenly.

"Me?" she shook her head. "*Non, m'sieu', nevaire. I am of France.*"

"Yes; but—I have surely seen you before—somewhere."

Recognition slowly dawned in her eyes.

"In Boston—that so ogly *cit  *—I sink I see *m'sieu'*—once, twice—on street, or in shop. But always vary *triste—m  lancolique, n'est-ce-pas?*"

He drew his dark brows into a frowning line.

"I desired to enlist in the British army," he told her, in the somewhat wooden French of the average Englishman who attempts to acquire the elegant language of his neighbors across the channel.

Her face became suddenly radiant.

"Ah, you spik my language!" she cried. "And also you would fight for my country. . . . But w'y, zen, aire you here?"

"My mother is an American," he explained, his face crimsoning under her questioning eyes.

"I—I'm afraid you wouldn't understand——"

She was obviously eager to make the attempt, and he went on haltingly:

"You see—I can speak pretty fair French, and

they wanted me for an interpreter. Most of our Tommies can't talk anything but cockney, and so they—they—— My word! I can't seem to remember my tenses when you look at me like that!"

He had lapsed into English and was smiling at her boyishly.

"Spik to me in Englis'," she entreated. "Me, I un'erstan' to beat the cars—you see? All time I study your so be-utiful talk. Good lan'—yes!"

Her pretty air of triumph halted the smile on his lips.

"I fancy somebody is teaching you United States," he commented. "But I'm used to it from hearing mother talk. . . . I told you my mother is an American?"

She nodded eagerly.

"But you will fight for France—eh?"

A dark wing of pain shadowed his face.

"How can I—when I am forced to be here?" he said gruffly. "My mother was ill—she was determined to come home. And I—like a fool, I came, too. Afterward, I found she was afraid I'd be killed."

Madeleine absent-mindedly stroked the yellow dog, who at this instant obtruded his starved person between them.

"I un'erstan'," she nodded. "Me, I am not

stupide—like zis so *méchant*. You come to America wiz your *maman*—me wiz my papa, *enfin!*”

Her gravity broke in delighted laughter.

“Star alive! I have sink we are allies of ze *entente*:—*vous et moi*—zis *petit larron* ees zat so bad, weecked Germany—an’ ze leettle *bébé* ees Belgium. You see, my frien’? We have conquer—we have rescue. Eet ees—what you call good *sign*—eh? We fight—*vous et moi, n’est-ce-pas?*”

Without realizing it the two had been loitering unpardonably, so Mrs. Pettibone pushing the perambulator with anxious haste had covered almost half the distance of their flight when she met them. Even then, the two unheeding young things would have passed her by without a glance—he was bending toward her, his eyes all lighted with ardor; she was gazing up at him; and the yellow dog, quite unheeded, was tugging hungrily at the dangling string of the minister’s dinner. What young Hobbs would have said in response to her audacious figure of speech can only be surmised.

“Oh—thank you!” said Mrs. Pettibone. “How very kind of you both to rescue my parcel!”

She held out her hand for it confidently.

“Won’t you introduce me, Mr. Hobbs? I see that you are friends.”

The two glanced at each other in sudden dismay. The girl recovered herself first.

"You perceive Madeleine Desaye," she curtseyed; "I have *grand plaisir* to restore again your possession, *madame*."

Mrs. Pettibone received the information and the parcel with unaffected gratitude, her small face under its unfashionable hat-brim quite pink with surprise and pleasure.

"I am Mrs. Pettibone," she said. "Perhaps you didn't know it, Miss Desaye; but you are living in my house. I was so glad to rent it. . . . Don't hurry away, Mr. Hobbs. I haven't thanked you yet; and the slippers—— Oh, yes; thank you! . . . And to think you know Miss Desaye. How very pleasant!"

"Land sake—yes!" agreed Madeleine calmly. "In Boston we aire already met. Me—I am surprise to beat band when I perceive Mis-taire—Mis-taire Hobb; I bet his—*mais non*—he bet your boot!"

Mrs. Pettibone's smile became slowly petrified. She turned wide eyes of astonishment upon the girl, who was dimpling with triumph over her mastery of the difficult English tongue.

"Miss Desaye," offered Mr. Hobbs gravely, "has been acquiring a special brand of United States from some kind friend."

"Oh, I see——" murmured the minister's wife.
"Really, some one should——"

Mechanically she tucked the three lamb-chops under the baby's blanket, cruelly ignoring a pair of bright brown eyes and a small, wistful yellow nose.

At this slight disturbance of his swathings the youthful occupant of the vehicle awoke to a realization of his rights.

It was his lawful time to cry—being ten minutes of his lunch hour—and he announced the fact, loudly, even terrifyingly—to the uninitiated.

Mr. Hobbs glanced at his watch, with the air of one suddenly recalled to earth after a brief sojourn in a super-world.

"Er—I fear I may be needed in the shop," he bethought himself regretfully. "I have the honor to bid you good-morning, ladies."

And he marched away, very erect and soldierly, aware of Madeleine's bright gaze, which appeared to be boring a hole right through to his heart—like a well-aimed bullet.

"How very odd for you to have met Mr. Hobbs before!" observed Mrs. Pettibone, striving to ignore the shrill protests of her child. . . .

"No; he is not ill, my dear, only hungry. I will take him home directly. . . . He seems a very nice young man."

Her glance directed the comment from the displeased infant to the rapidly receding figure of Mr. Hobbs. "Have you known him long?"

Madeleine reflected, her pretty head on one side.

"I zink I repeat to you one beeg—what you call wh-opper, when I say I know zat nize young man," she said. "He ees—*étranger* to me; I see him only vary much sad in Bos-ton. I say to me, 'He is one *charmant* person; zat man. I lofe him for his *beaux yeux*.' But to my papa I say nos-sing. He not like for me to lofe."

"I should think not, indeed," agreed Mrs. Pettibone warmly. "You are much too young, for one thing."

The girl's clear gaze was fastened on her face.

"You aire vary nize lady," she said politely. "*Mais* 'mush-too-y'u-ng-f'-one-sing'—I not un'erstan'. Eet ees *idiôme*—*n'est-ce-pas?* like pretty-kettle-o'-feesh? Vary much of interes' to me—zose *idiôme*."

Mrs. Pettibone was pushing the baby-carriage with all her feeble strength, her breath coming in short, quick gasps.

"I will—explain—later," she said. "Some one should——"

"Permit me—I entreat—to propel *bébé*," hastily interposed the girl. "You aire, I sink, wore

t' a fr-azzle—eh? Me, I am *robuste*; an' zose so leetle *enfants*—I adore zem."

Mrs. Pettibone sighed her relief as the girl gently pushed her to one side. The baby redoubled his efforts, his pink fists beating the air.

"My star alive! how he holler—ze *petit pauvre*! *Voilà*! I cause heem to desist—vary qweek, you see."

She peeped under the cover with pretty gravity, cooing little French phrases of endearment. The baby was her *petit cochon de lait*, her *joujou*, her *joli pigeonneau*, her *miette de sucre rosat*. But the youthful scion of the house of Pettibone would have none of it; he was blind and deaf—but not dumb—to all but a single idea.

Mrs. Pettibone strove to be grateful.

"You seem accustomed to children," she said weakly.

"Me—accustom? *Mon dieu*—yes! Vary much I take care of *bébé*. In my own countrie I play wiz so leetle *enfants* all times, like—like *poupées*—you un'erstan'? *Bien*! I carry heem in arms for quiet—*comme celle-la*!"

No one of the four (to include the yellow dog, who still trotted hopefully in the rear) so much as glanced at Trimmer's Emporium, which they chanced to be passing at the moment. The very existence of Kitchener Hobbs was forgotten—or

at least totally eclipsed by the gross selfishness of a male being much younger than himself. From his unenviable position behind the shoe boxes Mr. Hobbs witnessed the abrupt pause of the little cavalcade; beheld Madeleine confidently lift the baby, with all his blankets, and cradle him in her arms; noted Mrs. Pettibone's anxious flutterings and preenings; saw them pass out of range of his straining vision. Then his somber face relaxed in a boyish grin: the yellow dog had at last reaped the fruit of intelligent concentration in the shape of a neatly trimmed lamb-chop, with which he was rapidly skurrying to cover in a neighboring alley.

"By Jove!" commented Mr. Hobbs, under his breath; "the little chap got away with it, after all!"

For a long, happy minute he forgot that his name was Horatio Herbert Kitchener. He was even conscious of a sneaking gladness that he was in America, to the temporary neglect of that supreme pinnacle of human ambition: a muddy trench "somewhere in France."

XVI

FORTUNE was kind to Miss Malvina Bennett all during the spring and well on into the early summer—or if not Fortuna, that sly goddess of a pagan antiquity who rudely elbows our Christian Providence at every turn, then that superior overruling intelligence easily recognizable in every age. Mrs. Hobbs was sincerely grateful for the timely help which had saved her from complete humiliation; the “robes” which came from her establishment with praiseworthy promptness were not only startling in their fidelity to Paris modes, as depicted in American fashion-plates, but they wore well. So Madame Louise plus Miss Malvina Bennett prospered exceedingly.

“I expect I’m a reg’lar fool,” said Miss Malvina, “a-playin’ int’ your hand the way I be; but live ‘n’ let live is my endurin’ motto, an’ I’m a-goin’ t’ show you how t’ cut a dress-waist so ‘t it won’t skew-gee off t’ one side, no matter how th’ Lord made women-folks. Es I says t’ Ma, ‘No wonder most of ‘em is one-sided,’ I says, ‘seein’ th’ Lord was s’ short o’ goods.’ The Bible says, he hed t’ squeeze the first of ‘em out o’ one

rib—'n' a man's rib at that! 'S fur's I c'n make out, th' wa'n't any too much good m'terial in men-folks t' begin with—most of 'em bein' a pertty poor lot, f'om th' patriarchs, down. . . . Now you want t' lay your pattern—after you've drafted it, the way I showed you—ont' your goods, *jes' so*. You got t' keep in mind dress-goods is like folks; you got t' manage 'em. D'ye git the idee—naze-pa? es Mr. Dassay says. He's French; lives right nex' door t' us, 'n' I'm a-pickin' up th' languidge t' beat th' cars; same time I'm a-practisin' him an' Mad'lane so 't they c'n talk right smart. It's reel enjoyable."

Mrs. Hobbs gazed enviously at her able assistant, as Miss Malvina's swift shears shaped a dress-waist.

"My!" she breathed, "what an opportunity! The reason I had to leave Boston was because a woman moved in right across the street from where I started up my shop. She could put a French name to everything, and first I knew all my customers left me for her. That's how I came here."

Miss Malvina's mouth was temporarily obstructed with pins. But her look spoke volumes.

"I guess that wa'n't th' only reason," she surmised darkly, as she stuck the last pin into the heart-shaped cushion which was never absent

from her waist. "I s'pose that's where you got th' bright idee of callin' yourself Madame Louise?"

"Yes, 'twas," confessed Mrs. Hobbs; "an' it *did* take; you can't deny that."

Miss Malvina straightened her little figure and gazed almost pityingly at Mrs. Hobbs.

"Well, anyway," she said, "you've got a reel nice boy. I guess he's goin' t' git right in with th' young folks."

"I didn't know as you'd ever met my son," said Mrs. Hobbs. She held her head stiffly erect and red spots appeared on her high cheekbones.

Miss Bennett cackled happily.

"Thank God, I've be'n able t' afford a new pair o' shoes, for Ma an' me, too," she said. "He's reel han'some; I seen that without half lookin'. I'll bet George Trimmer's doin' a first-rate shoe business these days. Last year, I r'member, Orin Blake was in th' shoe d'partment: Orin's humbly 's a rail fence, with red hair 'n' freckles 'n' a nose skyutin' off t' one side of his countenance. Nach'ally all the girls was buyin' their shoes in Boston. They hadn't one of 'em any use fer Orin,—'n' b'sides he was married t' Em'line Banks. But now—you'd ought t' take notice o' the girls 'at's awful hard t' fit. Keeps th' shoe clerk a-humpin'."

Mrs. Hobbs appeared agitated by diverse emotions.

"I fancy my son understands his business," she commented with dignity.

"You c'n jes' bet he does," agreed Miss Malvina, "'n' so does th' girls. There, now; you'll find this 'ere waist 'll set straight an' level. D'ye s'pose you c'n shape them arm-sizes? Don't, fer pity sake, cut 'em out too much at th' back, ner in th' front, neither. I jest about lost m' reason tryin' t' keep them robes from pullin' out premature."

Mrs. Hobbs eyed the result of Miss Malvina's labors coldly.

"If I wasn't so drove with customers," she began; then stopped short to inquire fretfully:

"What do you mean by saying—by insinuating—— I can tell you my Hoddy never had any use for girls. His mind 's set on other things."

Miss Malvina nodded, her mouth once more full of pins.

"Yes; I know," she mumbled, "he wanted t' go t' war an' you wouldn't let him. M-m-m. You told me about it, m-m-m, I don't blame you none. I'd 'a' kep' him out of it, too; m-m-m, but you can't keep him out o' matrimony s' easy."

"Matrimony!"

Miss Malvina removed the pins, with a swiftness born of long practice.

"That's what I said, Mis' Hobbs, an' you'll find I'm dead right," she said firmly. "Bright eyes is more dangerous 'an bullets—when it comes t' keepin' a han'some feller all t' yourself. . . . But there, I guess I'd better keep m' mouth shet, or you'll be carting him off th' land knows where. . . . I gotta pick up my traps now an' be mosey-in' along home. Where's that green an' purple fer Mis' Henshaw 'n' them hooks 'n' eyes? Oh, yes. Well, ory-vwaw!"

Mrs. Hobbs followed the partner of her fortunes—there was no longer any attempt at denying their business relations—to the door, her vague eyes full of trouble.

"I wisht you'd tell me what you mean," she said. "I'll be worryin' night an' day, 'count of what you said. 'Twould be pretty near as bad as having him go to war—to be married young, I mean."

Miss Malvina sniffed disdainfully.

"You'd ought t' be ashamed o' yourself," she said. "Ef I had a boy——"

"Well, you ain't," interrupted Mrs. Hobbs. "An' you never will have."

"Anyway, I'd want him t' be happy, let alone how I was feelin'."

"A single woman can't rightly say what she'd do, if she was a parent," stated Mrs. Hobbs solemnly. "Being a parent is—well, it makes everything different, as I used to tell my husband. . . . But if there was any special girl——"

Miss Malvina blinked thoughtfully at Mrs. Henshaw's green-and-purple robe, which she was investing with newspaper, preparatory to taking it home.

"I wouldn't worry none ef I was you, Mis' Hobbs," she said kindly. "Young folks will be young folks, 'n' we can't expect——"

"Then there *is* a p'ticular girl?" quavered Mrs. Hobbs, clasping her bony hands.

"There! Now, I got you all stirred up over nothin'," lamented Miss Malvina. "All I got t' say is: Girls is jest like sweet clover-blows in the meadows; they look pretty an' smell sweet, an' th' young fellows can't no more help bein' droored t' 'em 'an honey-bees. Mebbe your boy is diff'rent from th' rest of men-folks, on account o' th' war, an' then ag'in mebbe he ain't."

Miss Malvina patted her parcel which she had pinned securely.

"An', anyway, Mis' Hobbs, you'd ought t' be glad an' thankful t' hev him git acquainted with some nice young folks. Mebbe it 'll take his mind off them nasty muddy trenches. . . . They say

the's rats runnin' 'round there, like kittens in a kitchen; ain't it awful!"

Mrs. Hobbs' faded eyes brightened.

"That's so!" she breathed. "It might take his mind off. Do you know——" She leaned forward and whispered in Miss Malvina's ear:

"I've been so afraid he'd leave me. . . . Uh-huh; an' go back 'n' enlist. My heart's been some better since I come to America. I guess he thought I was shamming. . . . But when you think of millions of boys, like my Hoddy, being sent out to—— Well, I don't think about it any more than I can help. I couldn't stand it, if I did."

"Me neither," sympathized Miss Malvina. "I quit readin' war news quite a spell ago. Thinks s' I it don't do *them* no good an' it keeps me a-worritin'. I us't t' lay awake nights, first off, thinkin' about all them men an' boys a-layin' out there on th' ground—some of 'em hollerin' fer water, an' nobody——"

"Don't!" begged Mrs. Hobbs.

"Well, I quit that. I hed to. I got s' nervous I couldn't run a gether straight. But Ma, ev'ry time she gits a-holt of a paper, she sets down an' reads, 'n' ef she comes acrost anythin' p'ticerlarly dretful she'll say: 'Jes' listen t' this, Malviny.' But I know what's comin'. 'In a minute, Ma,' I say.

'I got t' run up this 'ere seam.' Lucky my sewin'-m'chine ain't one of th' quiet-runnin' sort. I'll bet I've thanked th' Lord more 'n fifty times fer keepin' me from swappin' it off t' an agent six months ago. It's th' handiest way to break off a conversation. . . . Now, don't you worry none, Mis' Hobbs. 'N' I'll fetch this 'ere green and purple back tomorrow. You might go ahead with them sleeves. You'd ought t' be able to do that. But, say! Whatever you do, don't you try t' lay them bias folds. I'd ruther not be r'sponsible fer 'em afterwards. Add-you!"

Greatly to her surprise Miss Malvina found Mrs. Deaconess Buckthorn enthroned in the patent rocker in the hair-cloth parlor. For a minute her heart beat high with hope: perhaps her rash words of a few months past had been forgotten; perhaps Mrs. Buckthorn wanted a dress made; perhaps——

But that lady's first words dispelled the nascent idea.

"I come to you, Malvina, because you are a nom-in-al Chr-istian," she said; "and because we are str-iving to enlist even the poorest an' hum-blest in our work against a common foe."

"I want t' know!" murmured the little dress-maker.

"She's got a p'tition, Malviny," explained Ma

busily. "I signed with red ink, 'n' she wants you to."

"I don't know as you've learned the terrible misfortune that threatens our peaceful community," pursued Mrs. Buckthorn: "they're a-purposing to build—right here in Innisfield—a factory for the man-u-facture of B O M B S!"

Miss Malvina started back as if one of the munitions of war in question had exploded in the middle of her parlor rug.

"Fer th' land sake!" she said weakly. "Whereabouts?"

"Murderous munitions of a sinful conflict ought *not* to be con-structed within sound of a Chr-istian church bell!" intoned Mrs. Buckthorn majestically. "There can be no two o-pinions as to *that*. . . . You will sign here, Malvina . . . these sig-na-tures are written in b-lood, so you will kindly use this fountain-pen."

Miss Malvina gazed curiously at the document which Mrs. Buckthorn handed her. At the top of the page was written in very black ink: "We the undersigned, members of the Innisfield Presbyterian Church, do hereby earnestly protest against the manufacture and sale of munitions of war in our midst, as contemplated by the Merks Munition Company of Boston, Mass. As a church of Christ we are stubbornly opposed to

war and its desolations, and as citizens of a peaceful and law-abiding community we strenuously object being made party to the wholesale slaughter of human beings now going on across the seas."

"Ev-ery name will be of value, if only to increase the volume of pro-test," said Mrs. Buckthorn.

"'Tain't goin' t' be right in the village, is it?" asked Miss Malvina. "I heared a spell back somebody'd bought th' old woolen mills over b' the swamp, an' was fixin' up th' buildin's fer somethin'. . . . Most o' these names seem t' be women-folks," she added. "Can't you git no men-folks int'rested?"

Mrs. Buckthorn shook her head.

"The men in this 'ere town," she said acidly, "are dead 'n' buried in trespasses an' sins. All of 'em say they're against war; but when it comes t' writin' down their names in red ink under this 'ere petition one an' all of 'em has an excuse. Elder Trimmer thinks it'll be a *grand* op-pertunity f'r the *church*; so many new working-men an' their famblys comin' t' town. An' Deacon Scrimger says he owned stock in the old mill, an' he can't con-scientiously use the money he got for it if he signs the petition. An' Obed Salter an' Undertaker Beels an' Henry Pratt an' George Hen-

shaw—— Every one of 'em says bizniz reasons 'll prevent 'em from signing."

Miss Malvina seized the pen.

"I guess I could side-step that-a-way, m'self," she said. "I'll bet the'll be a lot o' new folks at'll want dresses made, 'n' like that; but ef my name wrote down here in red ink 'd prevent *one* nice young feller from havin' his eyes put out b' one o' them nasty explodin' things I'd write it— ef it was t' take th' bread out o' my mouth th' rest o' my life."

Mrs. Buckthorn screwed the cap on the fountain-pen, her mouth puckering into a tight knot during the process. She loosened it to remark:

"That sentiment does you credit, Malvina. . . . An' that r'minds me: how much are you charging for making up a plain gingham dress nowadays?"

Miss Malvina named a price slightly in excess of her usual rates. She could afford to smile, as she observed Mrs. Buckthorn's protestant eyebrows.

"Prices f'r most ev'rythin' in th' sewin' line has riz," she stated tranquilly. "I s'pose it's th' war."

"I *had* thought of bringin' over a piece of goods t' be made up," said Mrs. Buckthorn.

"But not at *that* price, Malvina. No; not with fuel an' pro-visions at present rates. I cannot afford it."

She glanced searchingly about the little room, as she spoke, her eyes pausing at last upon the shining toes of Ma Bennett's new shoes, which the old lady with the eager pride of a child had thrust into prominent view.

"I hope an' *pray*, Malvina, you're not runnin' into debt," she added sourly. "It's a temptation of the Evil One, Malvina, to wish to appear better off than we are, an' only too common in this age of luxury an' love of vulgar display."

"I s'pose," joined in Miss Malvina briskly, "that there's folks a-plenty in this 'ere town 'at 'd seen me an' Ma carted off t' the poorhouse without battin' an eye—me that's worked summer 'n' winter, stayin' plackets an' arm-sizes 'n' like that, faithful, fer folks 'at don't 'preciate it no more 'n' the air they breathe. But I guess——"

"Other dressmakers are quite as conscientious, Malvina," interrupted Mrs. Buckthorn, as she replaced the document in her black silk bag and drew its strings tight. "I have had *no* fault to find with Madam Louise."

It was by a praiseworthy exercise of the will that Miss Malvina suppressed a carnal desire to crow with laughter.

"Well," she said dryly. "I guess mebbe I'd ought t' thank you, Mis' Buckthorn, f'r takin' an int'rest; so I'll tell you I ain't runnin' int' debt. I got work a-plenty; ev n ef the bomb fact'ry don't open up in the fall—which I bet it does, seein' the's folks in Canada int'rested. . . . I heared 'em talkin' it over in Salter's groc'ry, when I was in there las' night t' buy a pound o' their best print butter an' some o' their eighty-cent mixed tea 'n' a bottle o' an-chovy sauce."

Mrs. Buckthorn appeared suddenly transfixed, her hand on the door knob.

"*What* did I under-stand you t' say, Malvina?" she asked in a shocked voice.

"I was sayin' folks from Canada owned most o' the stock in that there bomb fact'ry out b' the swamps; an' Obed Salter, when he was doin' up my pound o' coffee says t' me——"

"But *an-chovy* sauce, Malvina; surely you were *not* purchasing an-cho-vy——"

"Why not, I'd like t' know?" inquired the little dressmaker. "All them tasty things, like pap-reeky 'n' stuffed olives 'n'—'n' patty-de-foy-grass, is reel appetizin'; ain't they, Ma?"

"What-say, Malviny?" shrilled the old lady.

"I was jes' tellin' Mis' Buckthorn we was gettin' so we reelly liked French cookin', Ma. . . . It makes a nice change f'om codfish 'n' like that.

Did you ever eat any pot-a-few, Mis' Buckthorn, or any—pantelette dee-muttong? . . . You didn't? Fer th' land sake! Well, you'd ought t' try 'em. Ma's picked up wonderful sence——"

"I fear you have set your feet in the broad an' dangerous paths of sinful lust, Malvina," said Mrs. Buckthorn, her chaste bosom rising and falling tumultuously. "I had *not* intended to speak of it; but it is commonly reported that you are—I blush to speak it—receiving p'ticular attentions from a *foreign married man*—permitting him to *kiss your hand*—at your *age*, too!"

"Well, I'd like t' know how *that* got out," murmured Miss Malvina, honestly abashed.

She glanced at Ma, whose ancient head was vibrating slightly, as if with suppressed excitement.

"I s'pose Ma must 'a' let out somethin' er other t' somebody," she said resignedly. "Well, all I got t' say is, kissin' han's, 'n' like that, don't mean nothin' pertic'lar in *French* no more 'n' sayin' *Mondu*—which is downright swearin' in English, es I keep a-tellin' Mad'lane constant. As fer her pa bein' married, I s'pose he must 'a' b'en once upon a time, seein' he's got a girl mos' growed up. But, dam-port, as Mad'lane says—when she means, anyhow, she don't keer a cotton

hat—a body can't help folks bein' fur'n; an' I dunno but what I like 'em that-away on th' hull."

"I shall *pray* for you, Malvina," stated Mrs. Buckthorn vindictively, as she passed out of the door, with the air of one shaking off polluted dust from the soles of flat substantial shoes, "at the *same hour* I offer up p'titions fer the *heathen*."

"Mercy-bo-cool!" suitably responded Miss Malvina. "Ory-vwaw!" And she waved a dingy little hand of dismissal after Mrs. Buckthorn's retreating majesty.

"Let 'em talk," she said to herself, as she laid out Mrs. Henshaw's green-and-purple costume. "I guess 'twon't hurt 'em none, ner me neither."

But she blushed almost like a girl as she recalled Mrs. Buckthorn's sentimental accusation.

"My! I wisht I wa'n't s' old 'n' humbly," she mused. "'Twould be reel enjoyable t' be r'ceivin' attention, even ef the man was fur'n."

Then because the weather was warm she removed her second-best hair-front and hung it on a nail, already bristling with tissue paper patterns, where it dangled like a dejected little scalp-lock before an Indian tepee.

XVII

THE young French girl who had been swept by the hurricane of war to alien coasts, like some strange foreign bird, seemed joyously willing to accept America with all its new-world customs. It was necessary on occasions to explain many things in detail to her father, who when not immersed in his books displayed a critical, even censorious habit of mind toward things American.

“You will not forget, my Madeleine, that you are not of the *bourgeoisie*,” he would say gravely. “I bewail the fact that in this country—where prices are of a highness—I cannot afford even a *bonne*; and to have my daughter go about the streets unattended is also a grief to me. But I beg of you, do not imitate too closely the women of the country; for however diverting, one should constantly remember that all of them are *bourgeoisie*. Not one is even distantly related to a nobility. *Pourquoi?* There are no nobility. Therefore carry yourself discreetly, my child. One day we shall return to our own beloved country, where you will marry and become the

mother of Frenchmen, who will be sorely needed in a land sown thick with the graves of heroes. In that day I shall have glory because I have preserved my daughter as a legacy for France!"

And he struck his breast with the grand manner.

Madeleine appeared suitably impressed with this exalted paternal view of her destiny; but in the meanwhile it was spring, and she was eighteen. Also, there were surprisingly pleasant experiences to be met with in this country, where young women were permitted to visit the shops, to make purchases, to attend church, and even the theaters, and likewise to make the acquaintance of such young men, as fortune willed. Miss Malvina Bennett (though not of the nobility) was nevertheless found to have opinions on matters pertaining to conduct.

"I guess ef you b'have yourself like a lady'd ought, Mad'lane, th' ain't no use in havin' a married woman a-traipsin' 'round after you," she promulgated. "I c'n take you t' church 'n' Christian Endeavor 'n' mebbe t' Loyal Tem'rance Legion. Then the's the W. C. T. U. You'd ought t' go t' that an' git a white ribbon pinned onto you. I promised th' Lord—es Mis' Deaconess Buckthorn says—to see you done it. But when it comes t' pickin' an' choosin' a beau, I guess you're the one t' say who it'll be. The's

nice young fellows a-plenty in town, 'n' once you git t' goin' out in comp'ny I'll bet th' other girls 'll hev t' look out. Not 'at I want t' make you noways vain; pride goes b'fore a fall; but I don't know why you shouldn't settle right down in Innesfield in a nice little house o' your own, 'stead o' bein' took back t' a fur'n land, an' like enough married to a cripple. I guess th' won't be no other kind o' men-folks over there, time they git through a-firin' off at each other. . . . Land! it's a wonder they ain't all swallered up like Sodom 'n' G'morrah!"

Madeleine's English vocabulary had by now grown and expanded like the scriptural bay-tree, so she was able to compare Miss Malvina's plans for her future with those of her father. There was at present no hero of France, maimed or otherwise, enshrined in her young fancy, so she could think of life in Innisfield with the same gay insouciance she accorded to the patriotic scheme outlined by M. Desaye. Marriage and the serious things of life were yet a great way off. Everything appeared fresh and joyous; even the distant echoes of the great war which reached the ear but faintly in this peaceful village of the new world did not seriously disturb her. . . . Sometimes she would find her father, his head bowed over a newspaper containing cabled news from the

elongated battle front, where the terrible curtain of fire lifted only to reveal the heaps of dead and wounded.

"I should have remained to fight," he would declare, tears of mingled rage and sorrow rolling down his cheeks. "Already men older than I have given their lives, while I sit here—a poltroon in cowardly safety!"

At such times he would rise, cast the paper of ill report upon the floor and stride up and down, his face drawn with anguish.

"Why did I ever come to this accursed land," he would wail, "where this so frightful war is a mere spectacle? They have no heart—these Americans. In the spot where one should find good red blood coursing through the center of the being there is a dollaire composed of silver or gold—hard, impervious. I have a suspicion——" and his voice would sink to a menacing whisper—"that the blight of that diabolical *Kultur* is to be found here also. All are Germans—or related to Germans. . . . Free America? *Peste!* I laugh at their vaunted freedom! In years to come this so stupid people will see! Their evil hour will arrive! Aha! It will be the turn of France to look on, as at a theater!"

It was after one of these frenzied outbursts of prophecy that Harry Schwartz arrived for a

lesson in what M. Desaye innocently supposed to be the young man's native tongue. It was a matter for painted astonishment that M. Henri Le Noir did not appear to assimilate the beauties of the most elegant of all languages with the ease one should expect. His pronunciation was atrocious, and remained so after hours of impassioned precept and example.

"Do you not by now dream in French?" demanded his instructor. "Can you not picture to yourself those brave compatriots at Verdun? Ha! I see them advance—those valiant heroes! I behold the gray wall of Prussians go down before them! But you—you see nothing!"

M. Desaye was wrong: the young man's eyes were at that moment particularly occupied (from behind the shelter of his book) with the slim figure of Madeleine, who was gathering the first roses of summer within fortunate range of his vision. How enchanting was the curve of the girl's pliant waist as she reached for a bud high up on the unpruned bush! Harry was finding his lessons in French quite different from the picture his fancy had painted. Madeleine was never present on these occasions; he seldom caught a glimpse of her, even. He sulkily supposed her father was responsible for this. Even the joke about his name—it was, of course, a pleasantry

to be explained sometime or other—but it was growing distinctly tiresome to be addressed as a compatriot and expected to discuss the latest French victory or defeat in a language which did not appeal to him in the least. Young Harry, it must be confessed, was equally indifferent to the resounding German, invariably spoken at home when the oldest of the three male Schwartzes visited his son's household. Old Heinrich Schwartz had come from Germany with his bride six months before his son was born. The second Heinrich was an American, albeit by courtesy. In due course he became Harry and married a descendant of an old Puritan family, hence the third Harry was an American in reality, brought up to speak the rather slipshod English, jocularly known as "United States"; not unduly addicted to sausage, and meekly signing a pledge binding him to abstain from malt and spirituous liquors at the tender age of seven.

"I guess I'm a dub all right, sir, as I told you in the beginning," he confessed to his instructor at the close of an impassioned torrent of French of which he understood but a word or two.

M. Desaye stared at his pupil from under drawn brows. It occurred to him that Henri Le Noir's eyes were of a blueness—for a Frenchman, and his features—— He studied the wholesome

boyish face, with its summer coat of tan, its composite nose and its square American chin.

"Of what nativity is your mother?" he inquired in easy French. Then repeated the words in English, with an accent of disdain.

"My mother?" repeated the young man. "Oh, I guess she's just plain American. She says my great-grandfather came over in the 'Mayflower.'" And he grinned pleasantly.

"Your father must have been French, with the name Le Noir—of a possibility a Huguenot. You can inform me—*n'est-ce-pas?*"

"—Er—I say, sir," began Harry, his honest face turning very red. "I guess it's time I owned up——"

Then he caught a glimpse of Madeleine out of the tail of his eye and desisted shamefacedly.

M. Desaye perceived the blush and embarrassment and smiled.

"There is nothing to redden the visage in having one's descent from the Huguenots," he said indulgently. "But you should know of your family history, my friend. *Allons!* I require you to write in French a brief account of the Huguenots, including your own family history—if, as I suspect, you are a descendant of one of the émigrés arriving in America after the persecution."

Translated into less fluent English, the young man pondered the proposal dubiously.

"I'm afraid——" he began.

But M. Desaye was visited by an inspiration.

"Why have I not made ze acquaintance of *votre père?*" he demanded. "You will bring him next lesson, *mon ami*. To him I shall spik of all zose sings. *Bien!* for today all ees feenish."

Madeleine had gathered her roses and was arranging them in a glass bowl when young Harry Schwartz emerged from the house, his *Grammaire Française* under his arm, deep gloom upon his brow.

"See here," he said, with a total absence of the French polish his harassed instructor had been endeavoring to inculcate. "I'm in the devil of a mess."

"Devil-of-a-mess?" echoed Madeleine, arching her delicate brows. "Ees zat nize word?"

Innocent, adorable coquetry peeped at him from under her drooping lashes.

"You not *étudier* your *leçon* an' my papa es-cold you—eh?"

"I can't learn French to save my life," confessed Harry gloomily. "And now he thinks I'm a Hug—Hug-er-no; an' I ain't, of course. My grandfather is the Germanest German you ever saw. He's at our house now, eating sauer-

kraut an' drinking lager an' roaring about the war. I guess your father 'd kill me if he got on to the facts."

"I bet a dollaire—*oui*," agreed Madeleine, dimpling.

"Well, I must say, you're cool!" cried young Harry indignantly. "Seeing it was you got me into it—introducing me as Ong-ree Le-what-you-call-'em. . . . I supposed you were going to help me learn French. You said you would."

Madeleine surveyed her fragrant handiwork with a pleased smile.

"You aire so mad to me?" she inquired. "For what aire you so mad?"

"Because I—because you—— 'Tisn't fair to leave a fellow in the soup, the way you did. . . . He wants to see my dad; find out if he's a sure-nough Hug——"

"*Huguenot*," supplied the girl gravely. "An' you sink 'e ees not?"

"'Course he ain't! Dad's American; so am I. And I'm darned glad of it!"

Young Harry fairly irradiated stars and stripes as he made this declaration. Madeleine gazed at him dreamily, her large dark eyes holding unsounded depths of mystery.

"Me—I am darn glad *aussi*," she said calmly.

"I sink I like you because you aire not—not *Huguenot*."

"Say! by George!" cried Harry, suddenly soaring to a seventh heaven of unimagined bliss. "Is that a sure-enough fact? Because if it is I——"

He was winged in mid-air by the appearance of M. Desaye, a most amiable smile upon his lips.

"This afternoon," he said, with the faultless accent he had preserved through many vicissitudes, "I contemplate doing myself the great honor of paying the visit ceremonious to monsieur, your father. I have the desire profound to know more of you, my friend."

XVIII

BUT again correlated events combined to prevent the astute Frenchman from carrying out his designs. In a word, on that particular afternoon, he was not permitted by an overruling Providence to visit the home of Harry Schwartz—where old Heinrich sat enthroned in a splint-bottomed chair of massive construction, discoursing upon the exalted characteristics of the German Emperor for the benefit of his son, who listened respectfully.

When young Harry slid into the room, after depositing his *Grammaire Française* on the stair leading up to his room, his grandfather, in full tide of sonorous German, was painting the future of the inhabited globe, as it would shortly eventuate under the beneficent Prussian rule. Harry's mother, with meekly down-dropped lids, sat mending stockings. She did not understand much of what the old man was saying, though in the first years of her married life she had made a valiant attempt to learn the language of "the Fatherland." But as soon as her eyes rested upon her son she knew something untoward had happened.

The young man sat down in a chair which commanded a view of the street, his brow deeply corrugated, his eyes fixed and gloomy.

"*Wie geht's, Heinrich?*" shouted the old man. "How you vas, heh?"

Harry responded feebly. He had never liked the name Heinrich, and today it positively grated upon the ear.

"Vot dot poy needs is goot milidary draining," declared old Schwartz, staring hard at his grandson from over the top of his calabash pipe. "You know vat I do at your age, zon?"

Harry muttered something unintelligible, his eyes seeking the street.

"What's the matter, Harry?" inquired his mother in a low voice, her inquiry perfectly masked by the vociferous remarks of old Heinrich to the effect that a sojourn in America utterly spoiled a young man.

"Oh, nothing," muttered Harry.

"You Heinrich!" declaimed his grandfather. "Grate pig poy you—vat for you not go pack t' *Deutschlandt* an' pe a man—heh? *Herr Gott*, poy! haf you no lofe of coundry?"

"Yes," said Harry. "But you should remember that I'm an American, sir."

"*Ach!* You mage me sick!" scolded the old

man. "Vot iss your name—heh? Is Heinrich Schwartz von American name—heh?"

"Never mind, dear: grandfather doesn't mean that," soothed his mother. "They've been talking about the war, and it always excites Gran'pa Schwartz."

The old man surveyed his daughter-in-law belligerently.

"You haf pring my grandzoon Heinrich up to pe von pig sissy," he growled. "But ve s'all see vat happen in two—t'ree year. You vill pe glad yourself to brodect under dot good *Deutsch* name of Schwartz!"

At that precise moment M. Desaye, exquisitely gloved and cravatted, stood in the door of his dwelling. He was about to sally forth to pay his respects to an exiled son of France, one M. Le Noir, for the purpose of conversing with him concerning the decadent youth who bore his name. M. Desaye wore a smile of pleased anticipation, and he submitted gracefully to the innocent arts of Madeleine, who detained him for the purpose of pinning a moss rosebud in his buttonhole.

"You will not derange yourself with the solitude of my absence?" he inquired tenderly.

"No, my father," replied Madeleine. "I have my duties of the home to attend."

She used the English word *home* in her demure little speech.

M. Desaye twisted his mustache thoughtfully.

"Ah! I perceive you no longer find your own language adequate," he commented.

Madeleine's dark head drooped.

"We have no word for *home*," she murmured.

M. Desaye sighed.

"Nevertheless in France we have—*homes*," he said; "but not—you are thinking—as in America?"

"Not—as in America," she echoed. "Mees Malvina——"

"Ah, yes," he smiled, "that very amiable person will doubtless tell you many things. I permit you to listen, since you have no female companion; but to young men—no!"

He bent to kiss her cheek; then descended the steps with dignified composure.

"Ah, my father, one small instant permit me; there is in the rear of your coat a button—I run to fetch a needle!"

M. Desaye endeavored vainly to adjust his range of vision so as to take in the faulty garniture.

"I had not noticed the absence of a button," he told his daughter, when she again appeared, with her tiny work-basket. "But surely you will

not repair so serious a loss where the whole world may see: we will retire within."

But when, apparently much annoyed by the trifling occurrence, he would have removed the garment in question, his daughter demurred.

It would not be necessary, she said, when only the matter of a few stitches was required. She bent her head to thread the needle. It was singular how difficult an operation this had become.

"Exalted Mother of the Saints!" besought Madeleine, in the privacy of her young breast, "do not, I beseech of thee, permit my father to seek for M'sieu' Le Noir, for, as thou art aware, there is no such person."

And she twisted the frayed end of the silk thread, while her father looked on.

"Have you no wax?" he inquired mildly.

Of a surety she had; but alas! the wax must have hidden itself with malicious purpose. Seek for it as she would, it could not be found.

"Kind Lady of Heaven," murmured the girl, as she thrust her head into a dark corner of the kitchen cupboard, "once thou also wert young in years and wisdom. I had no intent to deceive, but only to avoid dissension—of which there is already too much in the world. Therefore be graciously pleased to aid me!"

And, all the while, the small strawberry of

pink wax was nestling in the nethermost corner of the work-basket. . . . The process of fastening the loose button appeared a tedious one to M. Desaye, but he was magnificently patient withal. What would you, in a foreign land, far from one's *tailleur*? He thanked his daughter profusely. . . . Ah! but quickly she must run for the *brosse à nettoyer les habits*! There were threads, visible only to Madeleine's bright eyes, and dust—*hélas!* how lamentable the dust in the houses of America.

"*Bien!* Now I depart," said M. Desaye.

Madeleine followed him once more to the door. Her heart filled with vague misgivings.

"Of a possibility," he was saying, "I will on my return be accompanied by M. Le Noir. If he is a Huguenot——"

"But, if by chance, you should find that *gentil-homme* a—a Pares-be-be-te-rien,"—she guilefully sought to detain him. "You will be friends—*n'est-ce pas?*"

Her father shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Of such things I know nothing," he admitted. "But I will still offer the descendant of a Frenchman my friendship—yes."

His foot sought the bottom step. He was about to depart. . . . The kind Lady of Heaven had not heard, then. What would befall Harry

Schwartz, she hardly dared to think; and it had been all her fault—all! But stay—a lady in a light summer gown, wheeling a perambulator had paused before the gate. She was about to enter.

"It is," warbled Madeleine, "our *propriétaire!*"

Her young face wore an expression of devout thankfulness. . . . One should not be too hasty in censuring the saints, who were doubtless occupied with many affairs. M. Desaye's eyes followed those of his daughter. He advanced nimbly to hold the gate wide, and Mrs. Pettibone carefully guided the perambulator inside. . . . During the simple process she could not help but think how wonderful that she—Philura' Rice—should be wheeling a baby, *her* baby, inside that gate, through which she had passed innumerable times in her lonely and neglected maidenhood. Mrs. Pettibone did not know that she was at that moment both an obstruction and an answer to prayer.

For a brief moment M. Desaye contemplated excusing himself on the plea of a former engagement. A woman, with a baby, did not offer a proper substitute for his contemplated visit ceremonious. But a second glance at the small flushed face of their *propriétaire* caused him to change

his mind. And his daughter Madeleine—she appeared singularly pleased to be receiving this strange lady.

Ah! they had met before, these two. He must discover the mystery of a yellow dog, to which both were referring with smiles. The yellow dog, it appeared, had returned again and yet again to the parsonage, where at last his wistful brown eyes and hungry little nose had won the compassion of the minister himself.

"We have named him Fido," Mrs. Pettibone was saying, rather proudly. "He follows the baby carriage everywhere, and at home he watches the baby, while he is taking his nap on the piazza."

A plaintive whine from the gate revealed the presence of the persevering Fido. With laughter Madeleine ran to admit him.

"Ah, *méchant*," she scolded, "so I meet you again! Tell me, is it *bébé* you love, or the *côtellette*—eh?"

M. Desaye had hastened to fetch chairs to the patch of shady lawn, and here presently he essayed to make the acquaintance of the lady, whose appearance (he was telling himself) suggested a delicate quaintness, illusive yet undeniably agreeable. She was, he learned, the wife of that *ecclésiastique* who had already honored him with

a visit. He protested that he was not worthy of such condescension.

Mrs. Pettibone blushed.

"We should be very glad to see you at church," she said, aware of her opportunity and of her duty, which she strove to keep well in view.

She gazed shyly at the French gentleman, of whom she had heard such varying accounts. Mrs. Buckthorn had referred to him darkly as "a godless person in our midst, given over to strong drink and Sabbath breaking." From Electa Pratt, who lived in the rear, had come scraps of information regarding the household habits of the foreigners.

"I sh'd think you'd hate to have such queer people livin' in your house, Philura," said Miss Pratt. "They set up nights till all hours, an' out in under that apple tree 's if the' wa'n't a thing to do in the world. I seen her bring a bottle 'n' a glass out t' him more 'n once. . . . Somebody 'd ought t' do somethin'."

But (reflected Mrs. Pettibone) M. Desaye did not resemble even remotely the type of person known as "a drinking man." He was smiling at her very kindly, and quite as if he understood her embarrassment.

"*Madame*," he said, "permit me to t'ank you.

I s'all be mos' happy to accept your invitation, my daughter Madeleine also."

"We expect," said Mrs. Pettibone, "to have an evangelist in our church beginning next week. We hope everybody who is not—who is——"

She paused, with an appealing glance at the girl who was cooing over the baby, nestled sleepily in his blankets.

"Of course it isn't a very good time of year—in the summer. But the session are anxious to have our revival begin before the Methodists; and besides, we can get the evangelist now, and perhaps later—I don't know why people shouldn't be converted in the summer as well as in the winter."

M. Desaye had listened attentively. There were several significant words in Mrs. Pettibone's little speech which he recalled without difficulty.

"Re-vival?" he inquired; "of your goodness you will make clear?"

Mrs. Pettibone absent-mindedly patted the yellow dog, who laid his head upon her knee with a confiding gesture. M. Desaye saw without seeming to see the work-worn little hand with its painfully clean but uncared-for finger-nails. Did all women in America despise the simple arts of the toilet, he wondered.

"A revival," said the minister's wife, "a revival is——"

She paused to reflect dubiously: she must not betray the fact that she really dreaded the revival. She had already ventured to confess as much to the minister. But of course all this had been discussed in the inner fastnesses of the parsonage. Outwardly it was her duty—as Mr. Pettibone had pointed out—to appear otherwise. She strove to smile.

"Why, a revival is—I will try to explain—we have a special preacher—an evangelist——"

"Ah, yes, an *evangéliste*," comprehended M. Desaye. "We also have such persons in France."

"Well, the evangelist preaches, and he has an assistant who sings. They—we all try to interest unconverted persons."

"*Qui n'est pas transformé*," murmured the Frenchman. "*Bien!* I un'erstan'. Many t'anks."

Mrs. Pettibone appeared slightly bewildered.

"We want—we hope every one will come," she concluded.

"An' be convert?"

M. Desaye smiled pleasantly. If there was a gentle raillery in his eyes Mrs. Pettibone did not perceive it. She had performed her duty, as the

wife of a clergyman, supposedly concerned above all things in the salvage of souls, domestic and foreign. Besides, Mrs. Buckthorn meant to call upon the Desayes: she had said so. And Mrs. Buckthorn would——

“’E ees not as-leep—zat small one,” cried Madeleine ecstatically. “See! ’e laugh to me. Good lan’, I like to embrace ’eem! ’E ees one—peach of *bébé*.”

“Would you like to hold him?” asked Mrs. Pettibone, with unexampled generosity.

“You jus’ bet your s-weet—your s-weet—— Oh, I forget w’at your bet. *Mais, oui*, I like bet-taire to hol’ zat *bébé* zan t’ eat his bes’ bonnet. . . . You permit—eh?”

M. Desaye perceived the startled look which had come over the face of their *propriétaire*. He had himself been visited of late by doubts concerning the strange and interesting idioms, so easily acquired by his daughter.

“You not like zose *idiôme*, perhaps?” he inquired, after Mrs. Pettibone had effected the transfer of her child to the soft arms of Madeleine—a process accompanied by all those inarticulate cooings common to the mothers of the race since the days of the cave dwellers.

Mrs. Pettibone smiled deprecatingly.

"It is really quite wonderful how well—how quickly Miss Desaye has learned English," she said; "but——"

"I learn from Mees Malvina," stated Madeleine proudly. "You are acquaint' wiz Mees Malvina—eh?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Pettibone. "I have always known her. Miss Malvina is——"

She paused to consider:

"She is one of the kindest and best friends I have. . . . But——"

"S'e is mos'—*adroite*—zat Mees Malvina, w'at you call clevaire," said Madeleine joyously. "She tell me so I mak' folks un'erstan'. Before I know 'nough not to come in out of—*pluie*—r-rain. Now I am aware of all talk Americaine. . . . La—la, *bébé!* la—la!"

"Zose *idiôme* of American speech are mos' *intéressant*," said M. Desaye pointedly; "but I inquire of you, *madame*—are zey *comme il faut* for a young *demoiselle* not of ze *bourgeoisie*? I hope I make myself of a clearness?"

"Well," temporized Mrs. Pettibone, "it is perhaps wiser to first learn—to first acquire the simple rudiments of English."

She spoke primly and distinctly. It seemed impossible not to harbor the impression that these foreigners were slightly deaf.

"An' zose *idiôme*," persisted M. Desaye.
"You not like zem—*n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Well, f'r th' land sake, Philura!—I mean Mis' Pettibone," chirruped Miss Bennett's familiar voice. "Ef it ain't good f'r sore eyes t' see you a-settin' out in your own yard, like you ust' to, an' me a-slippin' through the hedge."

Miss Malvina joyously embraced and kissed her pastor's wife, in the pretty foreign fashion she had acquired from Madeleine.

"An' that baby; ain't he the *grandest?* My! My! An' Mad'lane a-holdin' him 's snug 's a bug in a rug. . . . Kitty—kitty! Where's th' nice kitty? . . . Course he sees our cat, with his tail's big's two on 'count o' that there dog. . . . I says t' Ma, I jest got t' run over 'n' take a squint at *that baby*, ef it's only f'r a minute. . . . Say! Who does he look like? Kind o' reminds me o' your folks, Philura—I mean Mis' Pettibone—but his nose an' the set of his years—I d'clare, when he turns them eyes o' hisen s' solemn, he's the spit 'n' image o' Mr. Pettibone, when he says 'let us pray.'"

M. Desaye was gazing quizzically at his neighbor, whose appearance indicated entire forgetfulness of self. She was wearing an ancient black and white muslin, and feathery curls of white hair were blowing about her forehead. For

perhaps the first time he noticed the brightness of Miss Malvina's eyes and the piquant energy of her gestures. The name Bennett did not, it was true, suggest any sprightly admixture of French blood; but there was a certain manner, a certain *verve*——

“In this country,” he mused, “where one finds all races commingled like salad in a bowl one can never be sure.”

With this thought in mind, he looked at his neighbor a second time, then a third; and the little dressmaker recalled to self-consciousness by his earnest scrutiny, suddenly clapped her hands to her forehead.

“My stars alive!” she cried, “ef I ain't gone an' come over here without my hair front; it bein' s' warm, I took it off 'n' hung it on a nail yistiday, then I guess I must 'a' slipped some paper patterns over it an' clean fergot it. I bet I look most 's bad 's Billy Sunday, after he's through a-preachin' t' sinners!”

XIX

YOUNG Horatio Herbert Kitchener Hobbs turned from the mirror, where he had been knotting his tie with scrupulous care, and faced his mother. He was a handsome fellow, and Mrs. Hobbs' eyes filled with ready tears as she gazed at him: If she had not compelled him—by every fond art known to mothers—to accompany her to America, that beautiful young face might even now be hidden in some shallow grave behind the Somme. But she dared not speak her thoughts to her son. Instead, she fell to trembling under his somber eyes. She was afraid of what he had to say. She was always afraid of late, and shivered at the slightest sound.

Her son fetched a deep, short breath and exhaled it sharply.

"What's the matter with you, mother?" he demanded with some impatience.

"With me? Oh, nothing," the woman lied hurriedly. "I—was just thinking—what a nice necktie you've got on, Hoddy. It's—a real pretty color. I—I s'pose you got it down in the store.

. . . Does—Mr. Trimmer allow you any discount? He'd ought to, seeing you work for him an' seeing I—— But, anyway, I'm glad you've got such a nice job, Hoddy."

She wiped her eyes furtively and sighed.

"Going to the social?" she added, with an effort after a casual manner. "I would, if I was you. It'll be real pleasant. I heard some of my customers talking——"

"Sit down, mother: I want to talk to you."

He led her unresisting to a chair, placed her in it, and stood over her, the fold between his eyes deepening.

"I've been thinking for a long time I have no business to be here. You're comfortable now; got a good business started—thanks to that little woman who's helping you. You don't need me——"

"Don't say it, Hoddy: don't say it!" begged the woman, her head sagging weakly against the back of her chair. "I've been dreading it, night an' day, for I don't know how long."

"Time we had it over, then," he muttered.

"I'd a sight rather you'd get married, Hoddy," she wailed.

"Get married? Whatever put that into your head?"

"Oh, I don't know—seeing you going out, all

dressed up, I guess. An' there's nice girls here, ain't there, Hoddy?"

He thrust her suggestion behind him with an impatient gesture.

"Now see here, mother. I'm going to do one of two things. I've made up my mind. . . . I'm quitting Trimmer's this day week."

"Oh, Hoddy, you're never going to give up your nice job? Oh, dear! Oh, dear! My heart——"

He flashed her a keen glance: then unbidden fetched her a glass of water from the faucet.

"Here, drink this," he urged with rough tenderness. "Your heart's all right, mother—of course, it's all right. Now, listen. . . . Don't cry!"

But she continued to whimper weakly, clutching at the front of her dress.

"I guess you wouldn't care if I was to die to-morrow," she said querulously. "Maybe you'd be glad. Then you'd be free to go an' get killed in one o' them nasty trenches. . . . That's all you're thinking of day an' night. You don't care for your mother. You only care for getting your own way. That's the way with men."

He sprang from the chair he had drawn close to hers and began to pace up and down, as if he could no longer listen quietly.

"Thank God all women aren't such cowards!" he muttered. "Heaven help the world, if they were! . . . Now, see here, mother, you haven't given me a chance to say what I wanted to. It's this: I'll either go over to Canada and enlist—plenty of Americans are doing that, and I tell you straight I'd be ashamed to show my face in London now—or I'll go into the munitions plant here and help that way. I won't stay in Trimmer's shop another day selling silly high-heeled shoes to silly women. It isn't a man's job."

Mrs. Hobbs sat up, dabbing at her eyes.

"I hear somebody knocking," she said, with suddenly renewed energy. "I suppose it's that Miss Bennett. . . . But let me tell you, Hoddy, I'll never consent to you're going to Canada; I'll die first. Why should you go to Canada? But they do say they're going to pay the munitions workers big money. Maybe if you was to be real careful, Hoddy, I wouldn't mind that so much. Anyway——"

But he was already opening the door to a young woman, to whom he had sold shoes with prodigious difficulty only the day before. He passed her with a nod and plunged down the stairs to the street. More than anything else he wanted to get away from the sound of his mother's high-pitched American voice, which had long pos-

sessed the power of goading him to unexpected bursts of temper. He felt sorry and ashamed as he walked hurriedly along the dark street, splotted unevenly with wavering circles of light from the buzzing arcs. He had meant to be quite calm and gentle in explaining to her how impossible it had become to work longer for Trimmer. In common with other employees of the Emporium, young Hobbs had early been made acquainted with his employer's superior brand of piety. Only that day Mr. Trimmer had invited his shoe clerk to join the choir, training for the forthcoming evangelistic campaign, accompanying his request with a card, upon which was inscribed in bold black type the question: "Are you saved?"

The young man gazed at the card coldly; whereat Mr. Trimmer had exploded in a sharp: "How about it, Hobbs? You'll have to answer that question before the great white throne, some day. Why not now?"

The young man narrowed his frowning gaze to a point directly between his employer's eyes.

"How about yourself, sir?" he returned sulkily.

"I'm an elder in the Presbyterian Church," stated Mr. Trimmer.

His shoe clerk received the information with British phlegm.

"Is that tantamount to being saved, sir?" he inquired coldly.

"You're an impudent puppy, Hobbs!" barked Elder Trimmer. "I—— Confound you—I'll——"

"That being the case, I have the honor of quitting your employ this day week, sir," said Horatio Herbert Kitchener Hobbs instantly.

He squared his shoulders and his chin, while a great joy surged over his young soul.

"I can leave today, if you like," he added, expanding still further.

"You, Hobbs, get busy," growled Mr. Trimmer. "I'll 'tend to your case in the office, when I get ready."

The card, with its pertinent question, stared up at the young man from the floor. He picked it up, with the inward conviction that he had already taken the first step toward personal salvation. . . . And now he had taken the second. . . . But what, after all, was it to be "saved"? He pondered the question as he strode forward in the semi-darkness. Of one thing he was sure: to be "saved" one must be free to follow one's inner conviction of right.

Then all at once his introverted thoughts became sharply aware of the outer world. Hurrying toward him out of the shadows was a girl's

slight figure. As she passed him, almost running, he caught the sound of a stifled sob, and recognized the young French girl, who had been his companion in the chase, but a few days before.

He turned and overtook her in a long stride.

"Hello!" he accosted her with boyish rudeness. "What's the trouble?"

"Nossing," she denied.

"But I heard you—— Besides, you were running. Did anything frighten you?"

"I am mad like wet hen," she confessed. "One—two rude mans spik to me. I am run queek away from such person."

"You have no business to be out on the streets alone at night," he said severely. "Didn't you know that?"

She shrugged her shoulders:

"Mees Malvina tell me if I be'ave mysel' like nice lady in America I am okay. You un'erstan' okay—*oui?*"

He frowned.

"You oughtn't to be out alone," he repeated. "Where is your father?"

She glanced up at him, her face dimpling with mischief.

"Me—I am mos' interes' in so-so-ciable—my fat'er, 'e ees not interes'; *aussi*, Mees Malvina's Ma s'e have *mal de tête*, so I be'ave mysel' like a

lady an' come queek to so-ciable at ze parson-age—very nize person—zat Missis Pet-ti-bone. S'e do me ze *honeur* to invite, so I 'ave politeness to come."

"Well, don't you do it again," said Mr. Hobbs sternly. "America isn't a fools' paradise, I don't care what anybody says. It's every bit as bad as Paris, or London—worse, maybe."

He scowled down at the girl.

"Take my arm," he commanded. "I shall escort you to the sociable, and I shall bring you home again."

She shook her head.

"Me—I 'ave not require *beau*," she said sweetly. "From zis corner I run to beat cars, queek I arrive; *bien!*"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he contradicted her stubbornly. "Don't you suppose I *know?*"

"Don't—you s'pose—I—know?" she mocked him airily from under lowered lashes. "Me—I s'ould worry!"

"Where did you pick up all the slang what?" he inquired. "Really it's not at all the thing, you know."

"Sl-ang—w'at? Of kin'ness explain to me zat sl'ang w'at? I not know zose words."

"Why—just now, you said 'I should worry';

that's slang—the worst kind of United States. So is 'run to beat the cars.' You should drop all that sort of thing. It's jolly bad form. You don't mind if I tell you?"

She considered his question.

"You aire not of America," she told him kindly. "An' of *idiôme* I perceive you 'ave not es-tudy. Eet ees pitie. I teach you some nize sl-ang—w'at. You like to learn *joli*—bad—form—eh?"

He was staring straight before him with British solemnity, unlighted by any alien gleam of humor. Then he began a labored explanation in his wooden French, by means of which imperfect medium of speech he contrived to make his meaning clear. By the time they had come within sight of the lighted windows of the parsonage Madeleine's drooping face betrayed her complete discomfiture. Two big tears trembled on her lashes; she shook them off impatiently.

"Spik to me in Englis'," she ordered him imperiously. "Zat so beautiful *langue Française*—you 'ave keel eet—you 'ave *murdaire*. Me—I s'all spik all times sl-ang, like vary nize young man, name of Har-ri, teach me. He is peach of polite person—zat Har-ri; much bettaire zan you I like heem."

Mr. Hobbs frowned.

"Who is Harry?" he inquired. "If he teaches you slang he is a bounder, let me tell you."

"I let you tell me nossing," replied Madeleine with spirit.

He gazed down at her gloomily.

"We're fools to quarrel," he said. "I was only trying to help you; but I should have known better."

All women—he was thinking with youthful bitterness—were alike foolish, vain, unreasoning. A lump of passionate self-pity surged up in his throat.

"I'm sorry," he murmured. "I hoped——"

He did not in the least know what it was that he had hoped; but he appeared to himself to be gazing mournfully at something broken which had been inconceivably valuable.

"Me—I ex-cuse," murmured the girl.

After a moment's hesitation she held out her hand to him with the simplicity of a child.

He was silent, battling with his vague thoughts; but he took the small, repentant hand and held it fast.

"You 'ear me?" she asked. "You aire not deaf like post? You aire sor-ry for such rud' spik? Me, I ex-cuse. *Bien!*"

Her eyes sparkled up at him out of a lovely tear-mist.

He roused himself. They had by now reached the gate of the parsonage.

"I'll not go in," he said. "I've been awfully out of sorts all day and that's the truth."

He appeared to have forgotten her hand, still clasped in his own; but he was in fact intensely aware of it. Warm currents of hope and courage appeared to be flowing from that little hand to the very center and core of his being.

"You like bettaire to fight zan put shoe on lady," surmised Madeleine, nodding her head wisely. "Zose shoe make you feel mad like hops."

"You are a witch to guess it," he cried. "Tell me, shall I go to Canada and enlist, or shall I make shrapnel? I have only one life."

She had no need to inquire the dire significance of the word shrapnel. She considered his question with downcast eyes.

"You 'ave on-li-one—life," she repeated, "on-li-one; but you aire glad to give zat on-li-one for France—ees eet not?"

A great thrill went through him.

"Would you care," he asked huskily, "if I—if I never came back?"

Some one struck up the Star-Spangled Banner in the lighted parlor of the parsonage; shrill voices caught up the strain and carried it forward

in a burst of raucous triumph. Somehow the song with its shouting rhythm appeared to intrude itself between them like a visible presence.

"Eet ees *chanson patriotique*," murmured the young French girl. "Very loud zey sing—zose Americaine."

"Yes," he said dully; "they sing very loud. Are you going in?"

She shook her head.

"Suddenly I feel alien," she told him in French. "Take me home, please."

Her hand slipped from his, as they turned to go away, the sound of that boastful chorus gradually lessening on the breeze, till at last only the bolder peaks of song stood out against the background of their troubled thoughts.

At the gate of the small brown house under its tall maples, the girl paused: silhouetted against the drawn shade appeared the studious head of M. Desaye; also his hand, holding a book.

"He has not missed you," said Hoddy Hobbs.

"He sink I 'ave attend so-ciable wiz Mees Malvina."

"And you will tell him that you have not?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders, while her hands described an eloquent arc.

"If I tell monsieur, my fat'er, I 'ave walk

wiz es-trange young man? W'at you zink he say to me? Nevaire again do I spik to you, I am not permit."

"Promise me you will not go out again alone in the evening," he urged, waiving the dilemma. "It isn't safe."

"But wiz you I am safe—*n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Of course. But not with any one else. . . . Promise!"

She ran lightly up the path.

"Goo' night," she breathed softly; "one *mille* t'anks for such nize *plaisir*."

"And you'll remember what I said? You must not be on the streets alone at night."

A jealous qualm assailed him at sight of her hesitation.

"You spoke of some bounder you called *Harry*," he growled. "You'd better tell your father about *him*. You shouldn't know such persons."

"You aire mos' kind," she syllabled sweetly; "but already my fat'er is acquainted wiz M'sieu' Le Noir. He ees one vary nize person. . . . I hitch his wagon to my star—*oui*. . . . Goo' night!"

He heard the door close softly after her; beheld M. Desaye's silhouette manifest surprise, then arrested attention, as before the lighted

curtain flitted the girl's slim figure, her hands fluttering a piquant accompaniment to the words he could not hear.

In common with most Englishmen young Hobbs entertained a lurking suspicion of Gallic veracity.

"Of course she'll have to tell him something," he conceded to the exigency of circumstance.

XX

THE end of an arid August witnessed the opening of the Merks Munitions Works in the enlarged and renovated buildings over by the swamp. For months past Innisfield had enjoyed a vastly increased volume of business which the new enterprise had brought to town, and now a small army of workers had taken possession of the barrack-like buildings erected by the Company in the immediate neighborhood of the plant. Mrs. Buckthorn's protest, with its red-ink signatures, had been duly forwarded to the Company; its receipt had been promptly acknowledged by the secretary of the Merks Munition Works, who stated in a letter to Mrs. Buckthorn that its contents, as noted, would receive the earnest consideration of the stockholders. At a subsequent meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society the damning fact was disclosed that a document of quite a different sort had been sent to the new concern signed by the business men of the community, who had banded together to furnish substantial inducements to

the Merks Munition Works to "locate in our midst."

It was a burning, scarifying shame, agreed the ladies. And Mrs. Buckthorn—who as the head and front of the movement, naturally took the lead in the spirited discussion which followed—spoke strongly of "Belial," and mentioned the Merks Company as "an instrument in the hands of the Devil," which somehow mollified everybody's feelings. It was thought to be a truly providential circumstance that the Rev. George Pilgrim would open his evangelistic campaign on the very day the Merks Munitions Company began its operations. And when in his initial sermon—preached on a hot August night to the fluttering of innumerable fans—the Rev. Pilgrim alluded to the coincidence in picturesque terms, the women leaned forward in pleased attention still cooling themselves busily. Whereat the Rev. Pilgrim suddenly shot up to the full height of a substantial stool, placed behind the pulpit, and leaned far out over the desk, gesticulating with energy:

"Put down those fans!" he shouted. "I'm not preaching to fans—baseball or any other kind. Put 'em down, I say! Some of you folks 'll be so hot in hell some o' these days you'll holler for a drop of water to cool your

tongues; but you won't get it, unless you repent and be converted. . . . And there won't be any fans there. Talk about munitions workers! I tell you you've all got t' get busy—take off your kid gloves an' get into working clothes! You can't raise a blister with the sort of blank cartridges you've got in this church. I know your sort. You can't fool me, and you can't fool God, either. They tell me there's a munitions factory started just outside of your dead old town. There's nothing dead out there. Those men are working like devils in hell to make stuff to kill men's bodies. . . . But you—what have you been doing all these years to save men's souls? I counted fifteen saloons in this town today and six houses of ill-fame and a hundred loafers. I haven't counted the hypocrites yet, nor the liars, nor the religious fakers. Maybe you think there aren't any. God knows better. I shall know better after I've been here a week. It's my job to throw all such stuff on the junk pile. And I'm going to do it! God can't work with stiffis; he wants real, live folks that ain't afraid of dynamite. We're going to need shrapnel in this town to blow up the intrenchments of the Devil. And we are going to begin with the ministers and the elders and the deacons and the church-members—that's where we're

going to begin! And we're going to begin right now!"

The people in the pews derived a fleeting satisfaction from the sight of their pastor's pale, distressed face. Mr. Pettibone was pilloried on the platform in full view of his congregation. He had read from the Bible in his usual forensic style; his succeeding prayer had been earnest and spiritual, full of pleadings for the divine mercy and the leadings of the Spirit. But its phraseology had been formal and scriptural, it had differed in no wise from the sort of prayer he had been wont to offer from what was popularly known as "the sacred desk" for many years past.

"*Do look at Mis-ter Pettibone!*" whispered Miss Electa Pratt to her neighbor, Mrs. Deaconess Buckthorn. "An' Philura, too. Ain't it funny?"

"I do hope an' pray it's goin' t' do 'em good," responded Mrs. Buckthorn piously.

But the attention of the ladies was suddenly arrested by the high-explosive voice of the evangelist, which appeared to be aimed directly at them, with the effect of a bursting shell.

"What sort of folks do I mean by hypocrites?" he bellowed. "You don't know—eh? Well, I'll tell you what God means by a hypocrite——"

And you pay attention to what I tell you, or you'll wish you had some day: every pious old duffer who keeps a corner grocery, but whose weights and measures have been fixed so's to bring in a few more measly pennies to his till . . . know any of 'em? Every woman who teaches a Sunday-School class on Sunday and gossips spitefully about her neighbors on Monday, Tuesday, and the rest of the week . . . know any such? . . . Every girl who draws her skirts aside from her soiled sisters on the street, but stands ready to sell herself to the highest bidder who'll give her the right to put Mrs. before her name. . . . Ever hear of such a thing? . . . I see some of you folks grinning. That's right, laugh and be dammed! You thought I didn't get you, and you're just mean enough to laugh when you see the other fellow hit. God understands your sort. You can't fool him, not for a minute. . . . Why, there's more 'n fifty-seven sorts and varieties of hypocrites; I'm not going to waste your time nor mine naming 'em. But I'll tell you one thing, my smiling friend, an' just you paste it in your hat—unless you get down to brass tacks and corner that slippery, slimy *self*—if you don't hunt out your own particular brand of hypocrisy an' yank it out, root an' branch, you can't count yourself in

the kingdom. . . . Stop snickering long enough to take in the proposition: right *now* you're either saved or lost! Ever think of that? There's no rail fence between heaven and hell for you to roost on! . . . Your minister never talked to you like this, you're thinking. You're dead right. He never did. Why? Because your churches make cowards of your settled pastors. They ain't one of 'em between here an' Frisco that dares call his soul his own. They've got the notion that their bread and butter depends upon pleasing a lot of whining, hypocritical church members, an' nothing short of an earthquake 'll shake 'em out of it. How do I know this? Well, I'll tell you; I was the pastor of a church in a Western town once, and there was a rich brewer in my congregation. Used to locate of a Sunday morning right down in a conspicuous pew in the center aisle—a big, fat, pompous-looking chap. He was worth a million or so; and he had that church right where he wanted it. I hadn't been their pastor a week before one of my elders warned me against the subject of temperance. 'You got to be careful, Mr. Pilgrim,' says he; 'twon't do to antagonize Mr. So-an'-so. Why, d' you know he contributes annually to the support of this church something like a thousand dollars! We couldn't afford to pay your salary

if it wasn't for So-an'-so.' Did I see the point? You can bet I saw it, all right. I had a wife an' three kids, an' I'd never understood the story of Eiljah an' the ravens for a cent. So I was mighty careful to skate around the extreme edge of the booze question. Never went near it for more than a year. Then one Sunday the spirit of the Lord came upon me mightily. I looked down from the pulpit an' I saw that smug old sinner sitting there as complacent as a stuffed boa constrictor an' I let out the thunders of Sinai. . . . God spoke through me that day an' I ripped the booze question up the back. Then I told 'em the truth about their measly, cowardly church. And how they'd tried to put the muzzle on me, same as they had on all their other ministers. The Lord gave me utterance. In the middle of it old So-an'-so got up an' stomped out of the church; an' at the same minute I caught a glimpse of my wife's white, scared face. But I was free, thank God. And I stayed so!"

During the fervid appeal to sinners and the tumultuous singing of the closing hymn—during which a few impressionable girls and a sparse sprinkling of gray-headed men and women representing the "backsliders," came forward to grasp the Evangelist's hand—Mr. Pettibone's controlled features manifested little of what he was

thinking. He was dimly aware of various zealous members of his flock as they approached to congratulate Mr. Pilgrim on the success of his opening sermon.

"Tell ye what, that's th' stuff!" wheezed Deacon Scrimger. "Sinners needs rousin'. Give 'em hell-fire! I've be'n urg'in' it ont' our paster right along. But shucks! he's one o' them meechin' fellers, you was tellin' about. He-he!"

"Praise th' Lord! *you* ain't afraid t' speak right out," said Mrs. Buckthorn, wiping the perspiration from her massive countenance. "My, my! what a bl-essed season we're enterin' upon! . . . I c'n tell you some o' your r'marks fairly drored blood. But the's those in our midst needs rousin', an' I guess you ain't very wide of the mark when you begin with th' minister."

Mr. George Trimmer announced himself as so favorably impressed by Mr. Pilgrim's sermon that he was disposed to invite the evangelist to dinner on the following day.

"I should like you to meet the members of my family around the family altar," said Mr. Trimmer sonorously. "A few words from you on the subject of personal sanctification might serve to cheer us as we travel along life's pathway."

But Mr. Pilgrim shook his head. He never

made social visits while at work, he stated. Half an hour later as he turned to speak to Mr. Pettibone, he appeared to notice for the first time that gentleman's perturbed and pallid countenance.

"See here, Pettibone," said Mr. Pilgrim, "you don't want to take too seriously what I said to-night. I make it a rule to begin with heckling the ministers, because nothing rouses the people so effectively. Nothing personal about it; merely an opening gun. Wait an' see me open up on those intrenched old hypocrites tomorrow night. I sized 'em up all right. . . . By the way, how long have you preached here?"

"Twenty years too long, I begin to think," said Mr. Pettibone with some bitterness. "But what can I do? You were young when you broke your chains. Besides, not all ministers can be evangelists."

The Rev. Pilgrim smiled humorously.

"No; but many of them might be better employed than they are now," he said. "Mind, I don't mean you. . . . Though I'm not so sure, now that I've had a bird's-eye view of your field."

Mr. Pettibone was stonily silent.

"The fact is, Pettibone," pursued Mr. Pilgrim, with waning enthusiasm, "the church, as a whole, could be handled more effectively without settled pastors. What is needed is an organ-

ization of trained specialists, paid by the church as a whole, to do the work. Imagine one of these atrophied old churches treated to a course in spiritual dynamics by men like me. Men not dependent upon any one church for salary; answerable only to God and the central administration, which would have the care of all the churches. . . . Get me?"

Mr. Pettibone drew his brows into a frowning line.

"I understand what you mean—yes," he assented coldly; "but——"

"It doesn't hit you very hard—eh? Well, I'm not surprised. It's tremendously revolutionary, I know, and would involve a complete overhauling of those respectable refrigerators we call theological seminaries; but it's bound to come."

Mr. Pettibone strove to consider the matter objectively.

"Does your scheme provide for the usual pastoral duties, and—er—such special sacraments as burials, weddings, and sick-bed ministrations?" he propounded mildly. "It would seem to me that in severing the bond between pastor and people much would be lost."

But Mr. Pilgrim was experiencing the inevitable reaction, due half an hour after preaching. His versatile mind was now occupied with

thoughts of the hot bath, supper, and bed awaiting him at his hotel. He had already set down Mr. Pettibone as one of a negligible type to be eliminated from his future scheme of things. More particularly he had disliked Mr. Pettibone's timid manner of addressing the Deity. The Rev. George Pilgrim spoke loudly and familiarly to his God, using the vernacular of the streets. People sat up and listened to that sort of prayer. It was original, snappy, full of piquant surprises and racy epithets. . . . Pettibone, he saw plainly, was a hopeless duffer. No use of wasting energy in argument with Pettibone.

"Good night," said Mr. Pilgrim definitely.

"H'm—er, I should be glad to call on you tomorrow morning," said Mr. Pettibone, "for the purpose of conferring——"

"At eleven-thirty," snapped the evangelist, "not a minute sooner. . . ."

His wife, in her blue dressing gown and pomponed slippers, was waiting for him in the study when the minister let himself into the parsonage half an hour later.

"I thought you might be hungry," she excused herself. "And the baby waked up and cried. So I wasn't——"

"Better go to bed, my dear," he advised. "I—I'm not at all hungry."

His eyes wandered toward his books. She stood waiting expectantly, her hand on the knob.

"I think I'll read awhile," he said presently. "I'm not—er—sleepy."

She turned and came toward him swiftly, impulsively. With a spent breath he opened his arms to receive her. For a long minute neither spoke; then she stood on tiptoe to kiss his pale face.

"Silas," she said. "*Silas!*"

He patted her brown head awkwardly.

"Yes, my dear; I know—I know. . . . Better not say it."

"But, Silas, *that man*——"

He led her unresisting to the door and gently closed it between them.

XXI

"**H**ARRY," said Mrs. Schwartz, "why didn't you go to the meeting last night?"

Mrs. Schwartz's rosy face wore a slightly anxious expression, as she gazed across the breakfast table at her son, pleasantly engaged on his fourth muffin.

"I didn't see you in the gallery, or anywhere," she concluded, passing him the butter.

"I didn't say I was going," said Harry, watching a lump of butter sink luxuriously out of sight in the steaming interior of his muffin.

"Where did you go?"

The young man gazed across the table at his pretty little mother.

"Well," he said slowly, "I did have a hazy notion of stopping at the church. I've been practicing up with the choir, you know."

"Yes, I know you have," she prompted him, her blue eyes searching his face. "It was a wonderful sermon; I never heard anything like it."

"Uh-huh," murmured her son, folding his napkin with unnatural care.

She followed him into the hall.

"Harry!"

"Yes, mother."

"I heard something that worried me terribly last night."

"You did?"

He took down his straw hat from the rack and examined it with frowning intentness.

"You don't want to let that sort of thing worry you, mother," he said. "There's a lot of old tabbies around this town, who haven't anything else to do except——"

"Yes, I know. But this was—— Well, never mind who it was—I heard you've been seen talking to that French girl, and that she——"

"Well, what of it? What's the harm in speaking to a pretty girl?"

"Oh, Harry!"

"What's the matter?" he repeated. "You knew I was taking French lessons with her father. I told you so, a long time ago."

He threw his hat up in the air and caught it twice; the third time it struck the gas fixture with a jingling sound.

"Please listen, Harry. . . . You make me nervous, throwing that hat around. You'll break the globe."

"If I do, I'll buy another."

There was a boastful note in her son's voice which did not escape Mrs. Schwartz.

"Then it's true," she decided, clasping her hands. "Oh, dear! and I said I *knew* it wasn't. I said you wouldn't *think* of doing such a thing."

"As what?"

"Why, as—marrying a foreigner."

Harry burst into uproarious laughter.

"That's what *you* did, mother," he accused her. "You're a great one to talk about marrying a foreigner; now, aren't you?"

"Your father was born in America," she reminded him with dignity. "And besides, that's different: a *French* girl——"

"Now, see here, mother," he said gravely: "in the first place, I don't know as I have the ghost of a show with Madeleine——"

His mother made an inarticulate sound, expressive of extreme unbelief.

"And even if she—even if I—her father wouldn't look at me. He hates everything German like poison. . . . He thinks I'm French."

Harry smiled rather sheepishly under his mother's incredulous stare.

"He thinks you are *French*!" she exclaimed, horror stricken. "What would your grandfather say?"

Rather hazily he sketched the circumstances which had resulted in the small deception.

"What a thing for a girl to do!" she commented. "I should never have thought of it."

"Of course not," agreed Harry. "*You* would never have thought of it. . . . Pretty clever—eh? . . . I've meant to explain, you know, all along. But hearing the old duffer rave about the war—our brave compatriots, and all that sort of thing—I—er—haven't done it—yet. Of course sometime or other——"

"It's your duty to tell him right away, Harry," his mother said solemnly. "I'm afraid Mr. Pilgrim would say you were a regular hypocrite. You should have heard what he said about hypocrites, Harry. It was *awful!*"

Harry tossed up his hat once more. Then suddenly he threw his arms around his mother and stooped his tall head to her neck.

"Say, ma," he whispered coaxingly.

"Well, Harry?"

"I wish you—I wish you'd go an' see Madeleine. She's the sweetest, dearest—but I'm afraid she's way over my head."

Mrs. Schwartz held her boy jealously fast.

"You're too young to be thinking of such things, Harry. It's downright foolish."

"I'm as old as father was when you were married."

"No! I didn't realize it. . . . Dear, dear, how the time does fly! It seems only yesterday that you were running around in dresses."

"And you'll go an' see her, ma?"

Mrs. Schwartz drew a deep sigh, while she patted her boy's crisp, curling hair.

"I suppose I'll have to, if you—— But if her father——"

He kissed her hurriedly.

"Thanks, mother; you're the best ever. . . . Good-by! Don't worry!"

Harry walked very fast till he was well out of sight of his mother's tearful gaze; then he lapsed into frowning thought which at last halted his steps in front of an inconspicuous building on the main street. A flight of dusty stairs confronted him, when he opened the door. He mounted them, still slowly. A door at the top of the stair stood ajar and a subdued clicking of typewriters filled the corridor.

"No, sir," he heard some one say, in what might be termed a dry, business voice; "I don't doubt what you tell me is O.K.; but y' see we don't employ Germans at the plant—hyphenates, or any other sort. Our Canada folks are firm on that point."

A man, his hat pulled low on his forehead, plunged angrily down the stair. Harry stood aside to let him pass; then he entered the door purporting to usher one into the temporary offices of the Merks Munitions Company. The man with the business voice had not yet resumed his place behind his desk when Harry entered. He glanced sharply at the newcomer.

"Right-o! we're advertising for a few more men," he said in answer to Harry's question.

With the information he slid an application blank across the flat-top desk.

"Fill it in," he commanded crisply. "No use wasting your time, or ours."

His own time, it appeared, could be used to advantage in whistling "Tipperary" between closed teeth. Harry vaguely recognized the tune as he examined the card; it contained spaces for the applicant's name, age, nationality, and other data supposedly pertinent to the manufacture of ammunition.

"What's matter?" asked the clerk jauntily; "can't you read an' write?"

Harry's ears turned scarlet; he wrote with fierce little jabs and dashes, and in scowling silence flipped the card into the hand waiting to receive it.

The clerk nonchalantly narrowed his gaze

upon it, shifting his whistle to the corner of his mouth.

"Hen-rye La-Nore—that what you call yourself—eh? Foreign, ain't it?"

"I'm American born," said Harry thickly.

"Jus' so. But we're bein' kind of particular what brand. . . . Well, s' long as it ain't German. . . . An' you want to be a guard? Uh-huh. . . . Well, now you take this card out to the plant, main office, an' ask for Mr. Mills. I've O.K'd it. . . . See!"

A man with indignant gray eyes stood near the door, in an attitude of surprised attention, as Harry, still red and perspiring visibly, passed out, his card clutched tight in his hand. The two exchanged swift glances of appraisal.

"Where have I seen that chap?" Harry was asking himself, as he hurried away, his hat jammed low on his sweating forehead.

He wanted something to divert his attention from too close a contemplation of himself. At the back of his mind there already arose a clamor of protest demanding his swift return to the recruiting office of the Merks Munitions Plant.

"What! go back there and own up to the name of Schwartz, and let that bloomin' jay kick me down stairs?" he asked his boyish conscience, which had received much coddling at the hands

of his mother and was therefore alive and kicking. . . . "What's the harm in calling myself Le Noir, I'd like to know? Means the same as Schwartz. Both of 'em mean *Black*. Henry Black—that's my name, b'rights. By George, I've a good mind to change to Henry Black, sometime or other! Sick of being a hyphenate."

An hour later the good French name Henri Le Noir was set down on the pay roll of the Merks concern, at a weekly wage which would soon finish paying for Harry's building lot. In imagination he already beheld there a half-shingled house with dormers and a red roof. The thought of Madeleine as the mistress of this modest air castle gave the knockout blow to conscience, which finally ceased its feeble protests altogether amid the engrossing industries of the munitions plant.

Late that afternoon Harry again encountered the young fellow he had seen in the town office. He was engaged in checking up the finished product, which had already begun to be assembled in vast piles and serried ranks in the shipping warehouse. Harry, unused to thoughts of bloodshed and destruction, felt a slight shudder stiffening his blond hair at sight of those long rows of murderous shells; but it appeared quite otherwise with the stranger: the look of anger and vague disgust, which Harry had noted in the morning,

had given place to one of rapt enthusiasm. So intent was the young man upon his work that he did not glance up as Harry passed.

"That fellow's name is Hobbs," said the man who had been deputed to coach Harry in his new duties. "You'll find him here every day after noon. Mornings he works in the filling shed."

Harry turned for a second look at the man who was engaged in counting the day's product with such an air of triumph; and once more that vague shiver passed along his spine. . . .

His mother met him at the door when he came home that night, tired and dusty.

"Your grandfather is here," she said, in the suppressed voice she always used in announcing the large authoritative presence in the splint-bottomed chair. . . . "And, Harry, your father says you haven't been at the Building Loan Office for two days. Nathan Scrimger came over to the shop to see if you were sick."

Harry scowled.

"I've quit the Building Loan," he said sullenly. "Never get anywhere working for that bunch. . . . Got another job with a live concern."

"Why, Harry," exclaimed his mother. "Why, *Harry!*"

He edged past her and raced up the back stairs to his room, uneasily aware of his grandfather's booming voice in the parlor. Should he face the old man and tell him what he had done? Some sort of explanation would be required of him, he knew, probably at the supper table.

"It's none of grandfather's business," he told himself, as he strove to drown the dominant German gutturals in a rush of water from the faucet. "I've a right to earn my living any darn way I like: I'm an American!"

He could hear his mother stepping briskly about the kitchen, while the tantalizing odors of freshly baked biscuit and broiling ham floated up the open stairway. Harry flung his six feet of sturdy length on the banister and slid noiselessly down.

"Supper most ready?" he inquired in a whisper. "Gee! but that ham smells good!"

"Harry," said Mrs. Schwartz nervously, "I wouldn't get to arguing with your grandfather tonight, if I were you. And, Harry——"

"Yes, mother."

"I called your father out to the kitchen a minute ago to pry the top off a jar of pickles, and I told him not to mention your leaving the

Building Loan, at supper. You can explain afterward."

A conscience-stricken blush mounted to Harry's forehead.

"Mother," he said fervently, "you're *some* brick!"

XXII

"**I** GUESS, Mad'lane, you'd better go t' th' r'vival meetin' t'night along with Ma an' me," said Miss Malvina to her young neighbor. "I ast your Pa t' go, an' he says he don't want t' be revived till after th' war; 'n' unless the Germans give 'em back Alsace he ain't never a-goin' t' be. 'That's downright wicked,' I says, 't' talk that-a-way.' I kind o' felt it my dooty t' speak right out. 'Your immortal soul,' I says, 'has got t' be saved, no matter how th' war turns out.' Jes' like that I says t' 'im. Then I shrugs m' shoulders an' says, '*may-nam-port*,' meanin' in your lingo: 'but I don' know 's it's any o' *my* fun'ral.' I thought I sh'd die a-laffin' t' see his face. 'Why, Mees Malvina,' says he, 'I hope it would matter much to you.' . . . T' think o' him understandin' my French!"

"You aire sure progress fine an' dandy," said Madeleine complacently. "Me—*aussi*, I spik Englis' easy as log from roll."

Miss Malvina bent double with cackling laughter.

"That ain't right," she corrected her pupil:

"y' want t' say 'easy 's rollin' off a log.' . . . Uh-huh! . . . But I guess b' rights I'd ought to be more solemn-like, seein' we're goin' t' meetin' t'night. Me an' Ma 'll call f'r you in plenty o' time. They say seats is skurse after eight o'clock."

"As teeth of hen?" inquired Madeleine.

"Oh, y' don't *always* hev t' put in th' *hen*, ev'ry time you speak o' things bein' *skurse*," replied Miss Malvina kindly, "tho' th' ain't anythin' any skurser 'an hen's teeth, fur's I know."

The little dressmaker had composed her face to a proper seriousness by the time she and Ma Bennett arrived at M. Desaye's door that evening. The Frenchman, in the easy dishabille of his frogged velvet coat, received them with his wonted ceremonious politeness.

"Ah-h-h! *Madame! bon soir!* an' Mees Malvina! Honor me by entering my 'umble 'ome. Zat ees very nize word—'ome. You have made it 'ome by entering, *mes chère amis*."

Mrs. Bennett submitted awkwardly to having her hand kissed; then, seated in a large crimson-cushioned *fauteuil*, she gazed through her far-sighted specs at the strange metamorphosis of Miss Philura Rice's front parlor. . . . The rugs, the pictures, the dim splendors of leather-bound

books, the curious bits of faïence afforded the old lady a singular satisfaction. As she had frequently expressed it to her daughter: "I c'd set all day a-lookin' at the mess o' things in that house."

On the present occasion, absorbed in vague contemplation of her surroundings, she paid small heed to the conversation between her daughter and M. Desaye. Madeleine, she understood, had been late in clearing away the supper dishes; she would be down *toute-de-suite*—a phrase Ma Bennett interpreted uncertainly as referring to Madeleine's youthful beauty.

"'S fur's Ma's concerned," Miss Malvina was saying, "she don't need no revivin'. The' never was a piouser woman 'an Ma Bennett in this 'ere vale o' tears. She's went t' church reg'lar, rain er shine, for more 'n fifty years. 'N' as fer fun'rals 'n' like that, th' couldn't nobody be more faithful, always settin' in th' front row b' th' remains. I r'member bein' took t' fun'rals when I wa'n't no bigger 'n a grasshopper. But *Ma* ust t' say it never took th' laugh out o' *me*. . . . I remember tee-heein' right out at ol' Mis' Bascom's fun'ral, 'n' Ma hed t' carry me out. She warmed me good f'r that, I c'n tell you."

Miss Malvina was appropriately clad in her Sunday best Henrietta-cloth dress, with the pur-

plish black of her best hair-front carefully disposed under the brim of a black straw hat adorned with jaded flowers. M. Desaye secretly deplored his neighbor's costume, more particularly the hair-front, which concealed, as he knew, snow-white locks of persistent curliness. He listened attentively to Miss Malvina's remarks, making mental notes of several unfamiliar idioms to be looked up later. At present he had in mind an inquiry, which related itself to Miss Malvina's bright eyes and piquant gestures.

"You have lived always in America?" he asked. "You are a native—*n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Well, I don' know as I ever thought o' m'self 's a *native*; they're mostly colored, like Injuns an' such—but I was born right in this 'ere town. So was Ma. We're reel ol' timers—anyway, th' Bennetts was; 'n' I guess th' D'boises was, too. That's Ma's folks; Ma's name was Henriette D'boise b'fore she married Pa Bennett."

Miss Malvina pronounced the maternal cognomen *D'boise*, with a strong accent on the final syllable. She was astonished at the effect of her words upon her listener.

"*Madame*, your mother, was called *Henriette?*" he cried. "Eet ees *Française!* *Epeler*—er—s-s-pell for me zat *Dubois*. Eet ees *Dubois*

—eh? *Henriette Dubois! Allons! . . .* Now I un'erstan'. *Enfn*, I have perceive!"

Miss Malvina stared.

"D'boise is spelled D-u-b-o-i-s," she said; but it wa'n't never pronounced Du-bwah, 'at I know of. . . . Ma! Listen here, Ma!"

"Yes, Malviny," murmured the old lady, roused from a rapt contemplation of a certain carved tabouret covered with faded tapestry.

"Wa'n't your folks reel Americans?" demanded her daughter. "The' wa'n't none of 'em fur'n born—was they?"

Mrs. Bennett's dim eyes brightened to something like animation.

"I r'member hearin' my father say his folks come f'om th' other side," she said. "I guess pa was some fur'n: I know he ust t' git all het up b'cause folks never spoke his name right. But us childern didn't mind; 'n' after us girls got married we never thought no more about it. The' wa'n't no reason t' be p'tic'lar whether it was D'boise er Du-bawh—as Pa ust t' call it."

M. Desaye arose with an air of solemnity; he bowed low before Ma Bennett, heels together, hand upon his heart.

"*Madame Henriette Dubois Bennett*," said he—with magnificent disdain for the uncomprom-

ising Bennett—" *mes felicitations*: you aire of my countrie by *extraction*!"

Ma Bennett emitted a little cackle of remonstrance at the touch of his bearded lips upon her forehead. But by virtue of that chaste salute she had become forever enshrined, as it were, in those inner fastnesses of M. Desaye's affections reserved for compatriots alone. To Miss Malvina he said nothing, being apparently absorbed in a contemplation of Ma's faded lineaments.

"Fer th' land sake!" exclaimed the little dressmaker, with a sort of awe, "t' think o' Ma Bennett bein' *French*!"

M. Desaye turned quickly around.

"*Ma chère amie*," he murmured, "you aire also one of us. . . . Ah-h-h! I knew it: not for nossing zose gesture—zose *expression piquante*. You aire *Française*—all *Française*!"

"Well, I don' know es I care ef I be!" chirruped Miss Malvina joyously. "A body might be a sight worse off, I guess. . . . But what in creation 'll Mis' Deaconess Buckthorn say?"

Madeleine, who had entered the room unnoticed, observed the excited demeanor of the three elderly persons, with the surprised compassion of youth. To be old, to wear a false front and an ugly hat seemed to her incompatible with jubi-

lance of any sort. She betrayed little surprise when informed of the momentous discovery.

"*C'est le même chose*," she murmured, as she kissed Miss Malvina's cheek and spread a graceful courtesy before Madame Henriette Dubois Bennett, to whom her father presented her with *empressement*. "No more I can love you zan before. . . . But 'f my fat'er e' love you bettaire zen I am 'appy as tide at 'igh clam!"

"You'll kill me yit, Mad'lane!" vowed Miss Malvina. "Your talk 's a reg'lar hasty puddin'. . . . But sakes alive! We won't git no seats ef we don't make tracks f'r th' church."

XXIII

MISS BENNETT'S apprehensions were well founded: the church was already filled to overflowing when they arrived. But Mr. Henry Pratt, in the rôle of a zealous usher, thought there might be a few choice seats in the choir. He had been instructed, he told Miss Malvina, with a secular chuckle, to fill such vacancies with sinners, on the stroke of eight.

"Go 'long with you, Henery Pratt!" chided Miss Malvina indignantly. "Ain't you 'shamed t' talk that-a-way t' Ma Bennett an' me? . . . Ef we're sinners I'd like t' know what in creation you be?"

There was a loud chorus in progress, goaded to quickened repetition by the energetic young man occupying a conspicuous soap-box between choir and congregation.

"That's th' evangelist's reg'lar singer, Jim Baldwin," Miss Malvina explained to Madeleine, as the three ladies followed Mr. Pratt's brisk lead to the platform. "They say he ust t' be a street-car c'nductor. I guess you c'd hear him

holler from here t' Boston. . . . He's jes' grand f'r a r'vival."

Madeleine was still very much in the dark as to the nature and purpose of a "revival," when she took her seat next to a pink-cheeked girl who was singing loudly out of a paper-covered song-book. The erstwhile street-car conductor's stentorian tones penetrated the tide of song: "Come! wake up there! Can't you put some pep int' your singing? . . . Now, then, open up everybody, an' let her fly t' th' glory o' God!"

"Better pretend t' sing, even if you can't," whispered the pink-cheeked girl. "Baldy won't stan' for it t' see folks sitting in the front row with their mouths shut."

But Madeleine timidly shook her head: she was wishing she had not come to the revival with Miss Malvina and Ma Bennett, who, looking unnaturally pale and solemn in their black clothing, were seated on the opposite side of the platform. But she was temporarily relieved from apprehension when the loud young man got down from his soap-box and the evangelist rose to speak. For a while Madeleine strove to understand what the man was saying in his monotonously loud, hoarse voice. She thought he must be very angry with every one present, for he shook his fists, banged the books on the desk,

and when in a climax of fiery denunciation he climbed nimbly to the very top of the pulpit, she involuntarily clutched at the pink-cheeked girl.

"W'at ees mattaire wi' zat man?" she asked.
"Me—I sink I am alarm."

"Sh!" warned the other girl, conscious of the watchful regard of Mr. Baldwin.

Madeleine's startled eyes were gradually finding friends in the congregation; in a pew near the front sat their *propriétaire*, Mrs. Pettibone. She did not appear alarmed, the girl perceived, though her face wore the tense, strained expression which seemed to have communicated itself from the speaker to his audience. Madeleine had vaguely understood from Miss Malvina's previous explanations that the revival was a special sort of religion. It was difficult, she thought, to understand religion, and more particularly the religion of America. In France it appeared to associate itself with shadowy, peaceful old churches, with sunshine mellowed by immemorial stained glass streaming in across kneeling worshipers, and with the snowy veils and wreaths of one's first communion. In the world it meant doing small deeds of kindness and keeping the heart pure from guile.

Madeleine's wondering gaze roved from one troubled, intent face to another, till at last it

rested with pleased surprise upon Harry Schwartz, sitting next to the rail on the opposite side of the platform. A faint blush stole into the girl's cheeks as she passed in swift review their meeting of yesterday. "I think of nothing but you, all day long," Harry had said, as he held her hand at parting. And Madeleine somehow understood the English words perfectly. . . . She wondered if Harry was thinking of her now as he sat motionless, his head supported upon his hand which partly concealed his face.

She had seen Harry almost every day of late—always by chance, of course, and sometimes for the briefest of moments. It was most desirable—indeed necessary for one's health to take the air in the cool of the morning, or better yet in the cool of the evening; and it was singular how often one chanced to meet one's friends bent on similar errands of refreshment.

That queer Mr. Hobbs, too, who spoke French whenever she would permit. . . . Mr. Hobbs had come quite boldly to call upon her father soon after their small adventure, and had been received by M. Desaye with marked favor. On such occasions Madeleine sat unobtrusively silent, listening to the conversation, which as a matter of course concerned itself with the war. M. Desaye and young Hobbs had quickly found a

common ground in their keen regret at being personally absent from the great conflict. Then both men had glanced guardedly at Madeleine, as if in her quiet presence each found a satisfying reason for his conduct. Madeleine still found the young Englishman *intéressant*. But only once had she compared him in the privacy of her thoughts with Harry. There were no further French lessons, now that Harry was working in the munitions plant. And it was just at this point of their common labor that she had been led to think of the two young men at one and the same moment: Mr. Hobbs was working at the manufacture of shrapnel because he wanted to kill Germans; but Harry was working *for her*. He had told her so, both in French and in English.

His French was of a frightfulness, to be sure; but his English left large loopholes for the imagination.

"I'm going to build a bang-up house on my lot," he informed Madeleine. "And don't you forget it, little girl, you're going to live in that house some day. That's why I changed my job; I'm out for the simoleons for fair."

"Simoleons" was a long and difficult word for money, Madeleine learned; the very much soiled American money was likewise called

"cash," "bucks," "rocks," as well as dollairs. It was all very puzzling. Yet her thoughts lingered about the novel idea of Harry actually building a house. She had shaken her head over his odd notion that she should ever live in that house.

"But you will, sometime," he urged. "Please say yes."

"I not like zat word e-e-s," she objected, an illusive sparkle in her eyes. "Nevaire do I spik e-e-s; eet ees not nize word."

"Say *we* then," boldly urged Harry. "We, us, and company is a dandy idea."

Was Harry thinking about his house, she wondered, as he sat, his head on his hand, apparently oblivious to the thunders of oratory from the pulpit? Her dark gaze lingered questioningly on his averted face. But, no! it could not be—with that expression of keen anxiety, almost of pain. . . . Why was he so still, as if frozen into rigid immobility? Her girlish curiosity was rapidly merging into anxiety, when suddenly, as if all at once aware of the soft fire of her gaze, the young man looked up. Their eyes met. . . . An innocent smile dimpled the corners of Madeleine's lips.

For a thrilling instant he watched her, his troubled eyes full of the question which had been

tormenting him under the spell of the evangelist's preaching. . . . He had been considering his monstrous fraud in assuming the name Le Noir. He had known all along that it was questionable; that he should have explained himself and his paternity to Madeleine's father. And now he was using it to gain money—for her; all for her. But was it honest money?

Mr. Pilgrim had chosen the subject of Honesty with God and Man, as the topic of his sermon that night. With unsparing hand he had stripped off the multi-colored rags of hypocrisy and deceit with which sinning humanity strives to cover its nakedness. A wayfaring man, though a fool, could furnish no valid excuse for not understanding the purport of Mr. Pilgrim's discourse. The entire congregation—with the exception of Madeleine, whose engrossing thoughts in fluent French shut out all save the sound of the preacher's voice—realized themselves glissading down a slippery incline leading to fiery death. Thus it was that Harry—his stupefied conscience once more awake and loudly seconding the sermon—beheld only one way of escape: he must presently stumble to his feet and before all the staring eyes of the village must somehow compass the distance between his shaky camp-chair and the open space before the pulpit reserved for those "under

conviction." He must confess his sins—particularly those of omission—to some one, any one. There was no other way by which to save his soul from that eternity of poignant misery which yawned beneath his very feet. The reproaches, humiliation, and obloquy which would assuredly follow upon the heels of his confession seemed of little moment to Harry compared with the blessed relief of once more facing his future with unabashed eyes. He must—he would be "saved" at any sacrifice of pride or passion.

In token of this momentous decision Harry once more raised his head and straightened his bowed shoulders. His eyes were searching the crowded room for his mother's face. She would be horrified, he knew, at the revelation of his crime—his deceit appeared no less than a crime to Harry in his excitement—but she would be happy when—— Then all at once his heart leaped to his throat. . . . Some potent force had drawn his questing gaze to the chairs opposite—to Madeleine's face, with its soft rose and the melting fire of dark eyes. . . . Madeleine smiled. . . .

After all, what was there to confess? He had committed no sin worthy of an unthinkable Hades. . . . Had not Madeleine given him that name? Like a knight of old he would wear his

lady's favor in the battle of modern existence. It was a glorious thought.

The loud singing waxed and waned, obeying the imperious baton of the young man on the soap-box. Harry's lusty young baritone swelled the chorus. He felt joyously light and free, as he watched the reluctant progress of persons from all parts of the house toward that small cleared space before the pulpit. The evangelist was stooping forward to grasp the hands out-reached to his, his lean face flushed with the triumph of hard-won victory.

"That's right! That's right!" he was saying, over and over.

When the slow procession of repentant sinners appeared to linger unduly he again leaped to his feet, by turns pleading, cajoling, threatening. The "personal workers" under the whip and spur of his stinging rebukes redoubled their efforts. Harry watched impersonally the majestic approach of Mrs. Deaconess Buckthorn, as she mounted the wooden steps of the platform. Then he glanced once more at Madeleine, who stood gazing at the confused scene with the wide-eyed amazement of a child. He saw the pink-cheeked girl stoop to whisper in her ear; saw Madeleine's puzzled smile. And a sort of fierce indignation surged up within him.

It was as if some ignorant blunderer had ruthlessly broken the innocent sleep of childhood.

"Darling!" he muttered to himself. "She doesn't understand a word of this farce. Why should she?"

Then he became aware that Mrs. Buckthorn had come to a standstill at his side; her eyes, between opposing folds of flesh, were fixed tearfully upon him.

"My de-ar young friend," she said, "I've been a-watchin' you all through that b-lesSED sermon. An' thinks, s' I, Harry Schwartz is 'a sinner under conviction, if ever I see one. Praise th' Lord! Let me take you b' th' hand an' lead you t' th' ark of safety."

Harry shook off the moist, fat hand which sought to enfold his own.

"Oh, I—guess you're mistaken," he muttered. "I'm all right."

"Oh, my *de-ar* boy, *don't* put it off!" entreated Mrs. Buckthorn. "If the's anythin' holdin' you back—any darlin' sin that's got a holt of you—do repent b'fore it's *too* late!"

But Harry pushed rather rudely past the lady. He wanted more than anything else to take Madeleine away from Jim Baldwin, who appeared to be urging her forward almost by force.

The girl glanced up at Harry with a sigh of relief as he gained her side.

"Oh, I like bes' t' de-part from zis so es-trange plaice," she murmured plaintively. "Me—I am not *dévôte*, *non!* To be a *religieuse* I will not. I find Mees Malvina an' go 'ome queek to my fat'er."

"Great heavens, man! Can't you see she doesn't know enough English to understand what you're saying?" demanded Harry roughly. "Leave her alone, will you?"

Mr. Baldwin stared angrily at the intruder.

"You'd better hit the trail yourself, young man," was his trenchant advice; "before the trail hits you—see?"

Harry's sole reply consisted in a well-conducted retreat.

"Never you mind Miss Malvina," he said to Madeleine, "I'll take you home all right."

XXIV

THAT same evening Mr. Kitchener Hobbs had also attended the services in Mr. Pettibone's church. He had done so for a good yet simple reason entirely disassociated with religious convictions of any sort: Mrs. Pettibone had asked him very sweetly to come. The little lady was walking slowly along the street pushing the perambulator before her; enthroned in this luxurious vehicle and quite pink and complacent, young Master Pettibone viewed the passing show, which consisted at the moment of a muddy farm-wagon, a yellow dog, frisking ahead with extravagant demonstrations of joy, and a single rather grimy pedestrian. This person would have hurried past without show of recognition had not Mrs. Pettibone stopped him.

"Why, Mr. Hobbs," she said; "how do you do?"

The young man touched his cap respectfully. He did not wish to stop and talk with Mrs. Pettibone; but he appeared to have no choice in the matter.

"Don't you think the baby has grown?" she

demanded proudly. "He'll soon be six months old!"

The young Englishman affected to examine the infant with surprise. He was a thorough gentleman, as was the illustrious soldier whose name he bore.

"He's jolly well grown since I saw him last," he agreed with gratifying sincerity. "And is that the dog we chased the day you exchanged your slippers, Mrs. Pettibone?"

Mrs. Pettibone beamed rosily upon Mr. Hobbs. To think of his recalling the trifling circumstance so precisely! He must really be a remarkable young man. She would speak to Mr. Pettibone about him. . . . In the meanwhile she must not forget his immortal soul.

"It's the very same dog," she told him. "He's the *most* intelligent animal, and he *loves* the baby."

Having exchanged these amenities, Mr. Hobbs appeared about to pass on.

"Oh-h," faltered the minister's wife. "I—I just wanted to ask you: are you attending the revival services at the church?"

Mr. Hobbs shook his head. He seldom went out of an evening, he said.

"But—but——" Mrs. Pettibone's face had crimsoned painfully with the effort she was mak-

ing to do her duty. "If you haven't, you really ought, you know. . . . Every one ought to—don't you think one should be *quite sure?*"

The young man looked honestly puzzled.

"Quite sure——" he repeated.

"Yes; of being—saved. . . . But, oh! I never could speak to any one properly about their souls—as of course I ought, being a minister's wife."

Mrs. Pettibone was quite breathless by now. She clutched the handle of the perambulator so tightly that her knuckles showed white through the skin.

Mr. Hobbs blushed youthfully.

"Oh—er—I'm sure I ought to thank you," he said. "But—er—really——"

"*Please* promise me you'll go to the meeting tonight," she persisted, still breathlessly. . . .

"I—I'm afraid I'm not a good worker in the church, but—if you——"

He was surprised to see tears glistening on her sparse lashes.

"I promised Mr. Pilgrim," she added dejectedly; "and now I've—tried; but if you——"

"Oh, I'll come to your church, if you'd like me to," he said quickly. "I shan't mind, really."

Her gratitude was touching; young Hobbs got away from it hastily.

Still he had promised to attend the meeting, and being a man of his word, he found himself in a rear pew as the church bell ceased its urgent appeals. He listened with serious attention to the sermon and the singing. . . . In the light of his thoughts it was unfortunate that to Elder George Trimmer had been assigned the task of speaking to the unconverted and backsliders in that section of the congregation where young Hobbs was seated. The conversation between the two men was brief and pointed; at its conclusion the erstwhile shoe clerk of the Trimmer Emporium, with a bitter smile upon his lips, strolled out to the vestibule. He had seen Madeleine enter with Miss Malvina and Ma Bennett, and the thought of himself walking home with her in the cloudy darkness of the autumnal evening soothed his ruffled feelings. Through the open door of the church he saw that a light rain was falling and congratulated himself on his forethought in bringing an umbrella.

It seemed a long time before he saw her coming through the swinging door, closely followed by a tall young man with indeterminate features and a ruddy complexion. He had seen him before, he knew; also, for no reason whatever, he disliked the fellow, even before he perceived his

arrogant assumption of proprietorship in Madeleine.

"Good evening, Miss Madeleine," said Kitchener Hobbs in French, affecting not to see her companion. "It is raining; but fortunately, like a true Londoner, I fetched my umbrella. . . . You will let me take you home?"

The girl blushed with girlish embarrassment.

"You aire of a politeness," she murmured. "But—you will excuse mos' kind, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"It is raining quite fast," particularized Mr. Hobbs, still unconscious of the masculine presence at Madeleine's side.

Harry Schwartz scowled blankly at the wet, shining pavements and the wet, dripping foliage. Then his eyes brightened: in an umbrella stand near the door he spied the means of escape.

"I have an umbrella," he said, calmly possessing himself of a large, substantial article bearing the name *Buckthorn* prominently displayed upon its handle. He assured his badly abused conscience that he would return it before Mrs. Buckthorn had finished her pious labors within. Upon Mr. Hobbs he bestowed a single glance of defiance.

"Perhaps we'd better hurry along," he suggested to Madeleine; "then I'll hustle back with an umbrella for Miss Malvina and the old lady."

Madeleine hesitated: to avoid wounding a friend while declining a kindness required one's *savoir-faire*.

"Mistaire Hobb," she began, with a bewitching glance of entreaty, "I am very much 'ope you aire not mad wiz me. But I 'ave honeur to tell you Mis-taire Sh-sh-wart-z take me 'ome. . . . You aire acquainted wiz heem, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

The two young men stared at each other, with a slight—a very slight stiffening of their spinal processes. In their eyes shone the primeval glint of the male animal.

Madeleine was vaguely alarmed.

"Vary nize person—M'sieu' Le Noir," she murmured. "Vary much you like 'im, Mis-taire Hobb."

"I didn't catch your name, sir," said Kitchener Hobbs.

"My name is Schwartz," snapped Harry.

Then he grew suddenly pale.

"Haven't I seen you at the Plant?" inquired Mr. Hobbs, unpleasantly circumstantial.

Harry controlled himself with an effort.

"I work there," he said.

Madeleine had retreated to the door of the audience room, from whence issued triumphant bursts of song.

"Oh, I sink I bes' wait for Mees Malvina," she murmured, her eyes wide with apprehension.

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. Hobbs, deliberately turning his back upon Harry. "Miss Bennett might—er—be alarmed at not finding you."

Harry's heart was pounding furiously in his scarlet ears.

"Look here!" he said thickly, addressing himself to his rival, "who asked you to butt in?"

Mr. Hobbs assumed as well as he was able the expression of Lord Kitchener after his return from Khartoum. He did not appear to have understood the rude question.

"I think you will not have long to wait," he said to Madeleine, in her own language, which to his angry antagonist sounded precisely like the flawlessly unintelligible speech of M. Desaye.

Harry, all his Teuton and Revolutionary blood suddenly rising to the boiling point with love and fury, closed in upon Mr. Hobbs. He had not been so angry since a boy in the third grade of the public school had called him "sissy," because his mother had persisted in sparing his yellow curls. On that occasion young Harry had fallen fearlessly upon the aggressor, though he was twice his size, and beaten him unmercifully.

"You didn't answer me," he stated hoarsely, in unpleasant proximity to Mr. Hobbs' ear.

"No; and I don't intend to," replied Mr. Hobbs disdainfully. "You're the sort of bouncer a gentleman doesn't recognize."

At this psychological instant Madeleine's quick wits prevented a continuation of hostilities which might have resulted disastrously on the very threshold of the revival. She laid her hand lightly on Harry's sleeve, beneath which bulged angry muscles.

"Very much oblige," she said sweetly. "You aire mos' frien'ly an' of a politeness—*oui*. Me—I present to you one tousan' tanks. . . . We wait for Madame Dubois-Bennett an' Mees Malvina—e-e-ss?"

Into the final word—which she had declined to utter only the day before at his entreaty—the girl managed to convey such coaxing sweetness, such alluring charm that Harry felt his rage suddenly vanish like a wind-blown mist.

"All right," he murmured, his honest blue eyes beaming down upon her. "Anything you say goes."

"Sure it does," she made haste to agree, "you aire, my frien', of a right deadness; *très bien!*"

Then upon the smart of Mr. Hobbs' resentment she poured the balm of her smile.

"How I am g-lad for very nize ombrell," she warbled. "Mees Malvina, *aussi*, an' *Madame*, her Ma—snug as rug in bug—all—ev-e-rie one—wiz such gr-eat kin'ness of our frien's."

Mr. Hobbs regained his presence of mind at a single bound.

"Charmed, I'm sure, to be of some small service," he said, with a bow which would have gained him recognition in Hyde Park. "Permit me——"

He pressed his umbrella into Madeleine's hand, and was gone into the rainy night before she could utter a remonstrance.

Perhaps it was fortunate that Miss Malvina and Ma Bennett came hurriedly forth at that moment. Miss Malvina's cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright.

"Well, I d'clare, Mad'lane!" she exclaimed; "so *that's* what b'come o' you? Harry Schwartz, you'd ought t' be in there, settin' with th' mourners this minute: I seen you take Mad'lane away, jes' as Jim Baldwin was a-laborin' with her."

"She wanted to go home," Harry excused himself inadequately.

"A poor excuse 's better 'n' none," retorted Miss Malvina. "Ef it hadn't a-ben f'r Ma I

don' know but what I'd a-jined in with th' back-sliders. But Ma didn't ketch much o' what he was sayin'; an' b'sides she got a pain in th' small of her back from settin' s' long in that pesky camp-cheer. . . . An' then along comes Henery Pratt an' hed th' nerve to ask Ma 'n' me t' hit th' trail. 'Why, who's got on a trail, Malviny?' says Ma, innocent. I thought I sh'd die! 'Mr. Sign-painter Pratt,' I says severe, 'ef you'd a-took that sermon in,' I says, 'you wouldn't be talkin' no sech nonsense t' Ma Bennett. You ain't worthy t' unbutton her shoes,' I says. 'N' I'd like it t' sink deep in your years—speakin' of the subjec' of the sermon,' I says, 'which was *honesty*, that the paint on my dressmakin' sign is peelin' off a'ready—an' me payin' a dollar 'n' seventy-fi' cents for it less 'n' six months ago. You go down on that trail, Henery,' I says, 'n' see ef you can't git a-holt of a brand o' r'ligion 'at 'll make you mix your paint with linseed oil 'stead o' kur'sene!'"

Quite unabashed by this pointed exposition on common honesty, Harry spread the Buckthorn umbrella over Madeleine, while Miss Malvina and Ma went on before under the shelter so kindly loaned by Mr. Hobbs.

"Wa'n't it nice o' him t' think of two old women, like me an' Ma!" floated back to the

two young people over Miss Malvina's shoulder. "I'll bet a dollar Hoddy Hobbs 'll get a star in his crown fer that!"

"W'at ees star-in-crown?" propounded Madeleine, striving to pierce the gloom of Harry's demeanor.

"I never saw one of 'em," replied Harry dejectedly, "an' I guess I never will—*now*."

"Will I evaire see one of zose crown-in-stars?" persisted the girl. "You like zem—eh?"

"They'd look dandy on you," sighed Harry. "But I hope you won't get one for a long time yet. . . . Say, Madeleine, there's something I want to ask you."

"*Très bien*—ee-ss?"

A cold trickle from the Buckthorn umbrella winding deviously down the back of his collar still further depressed the sinking barometer of Harry's feelings.

"There's a lot of things I want you to tell me. I've got to know 'em, or go up the spout."

"Alrigh-t," the girl encouraged him.

"Say, do you think it's square for me to go on being called Le Noir? On the level, now, have I any right to that name?"

Madeleine pondered the proposition, expressed in terms of two dimensions, with care.

"W'at ees sq-ware?" she inquired cautiously.
"Eees zat nize word—*sq-ware*?"

"If I could jabber French like that nervy chap, Hobbs, I could explain in a jiffy," he growled deep in his throat.

"In a jiffy?—an auto-mo-bile? *Oui*—I un'er-stan'!"

"Hang it! I didn't say *jitney*," protested Harry. "Look here, Madeleine, we'll cut out the figures of speech, for once, an' try to get down to brass tacks, so you'll savez—see?"

"Brasstack—*oui*. *Très bien!*"

"Do you remember when you introduced me to your father—*votre fader*. You know? You didn't want him to catch on that I was German. . . . Of course I ain't! I'm American—clear to the backbone; and I'll knock the spots out of any cheap sport who dares to say I ain't. I'm American all right. But I've got a *Deutsch* name: Heinrich Schwartz. I don't care; it's a blamed good name. And it's an *American* name, because I'm one. And what's more, it's going to *be* an American name—for I don' know how long!"

Harry paused, impressed with the spotless pages of American history embellished with the name of Heinrich Schwartz, which seemed suddenly unrolled before him.

"It's time all this darned nonsense about names

was wiped out!" he stated with some violence. "Why isn't Schwartz as good as *Black*—or *Le Noir*? I'm blamed if it ain't! But I guess I've put my foot in it by translating it into blooming *belle Française*. . . . If that British chap should give me away at the Plant——"

"You call yourself *Le Noir*—at Plant?" asked Madeleine, suddenly pouncing upon the crux of the matter, like a preternaturally bright kitten.

"Y-yes," admitted Harry reluctantly. "They were turning away applicants with German names. . . . I wanted the job—you know why. If you don't, I'll tell you again: I want you to marry me as soon as I earn enough to build my house. . . . I—I love you, Madeleine."

Harry's voice was scarcely audible as he made his final fateful statement. It seemed to him that he had shouted it from the housetops; every lighted window glimpsed through vistas of dripping foliage appeared to be spying upon him with stealthy enjoyment. His heart thumped loudly in his ears as he waited for her answer.

But Madeleine, it seemed, was still pondering his initial question: ought he to call himself *Le Noir* in order to earn money? This much she had comprehended clearly.

"I zink I ask my fat'er," she said at last. "I

ex-plain all to heem, zen I tell to you—— You like me to ex-plain, *n'est-ce-pas?* ”

“ Then you *do!* Oh, Madeleine! ”

Harry's further utterance was choked with rapture; but he managed to possess himself of her hand, which he squeezed fervently.

“ But I guess it's up to me to face the music,” he added dubiously. . . . She had withdraw the squeezed hand with a little cry.

“ Did I hurt you? ” he inquired penitently. “ I'm so happy I guess I didn't realize—say, Madeleine; did you *mean* it? ”

Her upturned face in the strong radiance of a swinging arc light was so lovely that he yearned to kiss it; but the puzzled pucker between her brows deflected him from his purpose.

“ I can never be sure just how much you take in of what I'm saying,” he complained. “ Darn it! if I'd only worked harder while I had the chance I might have been able to *parlez-vous*, by now. . . . Come to think, I do know the first part of one verb: *J'aime!* *Savez j'aime*, Madeleine? ”

To his dismay she burst into ringing mirth.

“ You aire mos' fonny, 'Arry,” she told him. “ Qweek I die laffin'.”

“ Funny? ” he echoed. “ Then you think it's a joke, when a man asks you to marry him, do you? That's what I'm trying to say. I want—

you—for—my—wife! . . . Do you know what *wife* means?"

His face, changed subtly from the inchoate good looks of the boy to the stern masterfulness of the man bent toward her.

"Do you?" he urged.

She shook her head airily.

"I zink bes' you *étudier le dictionnaire Français*," she said. "*Enfn*, I un'erstan' more qweek."

Her eyes, bright as stars in the uncertain light, told him nothing.

"All right," he said doggedly. "I'll get busy. There's a few words I'm going to make you understand, if I study all night."

"*Merci*—one sousan', my frien'; me—I also es-tudy my *dictionnaire Anglais* an' I fin' all zose es-trange word—zose wi-ife an' tomarrieem. You like me to do eet—'Arry?"

"*Madeleine!*"

But already they had reached the gate of Miss Philura's little house—which had once swung wide to the sober, middle-aged wooing of the Rev. Silas Pettibone—and she had passed quickly inside.

"Zose *parapluie*," she reminded him. "You aire oblige to take heem?"

"That's right!" he exclaimed, a vision of the

outraged Mrs. Buckthorn, vainly searching for her umbrella, adding itself to the sum total of his discomfiture. . . . As he sprinted down the street he could hear Madeleine's high sweet call of greeting and farewell to Miss Malvina, who had evidently been watching for her safe arrival.

"Confound it!" murmured Harry, vaguely displeased with Miss Malvina, the world at large, and most of all with himself.

XXV

AS was entirely natural, Mr. Hobbs called for his umbrella on the following evening. He did not, he explained to M. Desaye, wish to put any one to the trouble of returning the *parapluie*, which he was only too happy to have had with him for the service of the ladies.

M. Desaye knew of no such umbrella. He searched among his own without success. But would not Monsieur Hobbs do him the honor of entering his humble abode? His daughter Madeleine, who was at the moment visiting their amiable neighbor, Mademoiselle Dubois-Bennett, might know about the umbrella. And this put him in mind of the singularly interesting discovery he had made with regard to Miss Malvina's ancestry. It was pleasant to be able to relate the piquant incident in his own tongue, which the young Englishman understood without difficulty. And so for the better part of an hour the father of Madeleine discoursed at length on the amazing *tout ensemble* of the so-called American, born of many nations, yet resembling

none. Even the German-American—M. Desaye pulled a wry face at the hyphenate word—frequently exhibited small traces of his deplorable Teuton blood. . . . Did M. Hobbs, *par example*, number any such person among his acquaintance?

Mr. Hobbs hesitated. Here was the appropriate dagger, its handle toward his hand. Should he use it? Was it not, indeed, his duty to warn the unworldly father of Madeleine that a certain bounder—he could think of no other descriptive adjective for the rude and bucolic Harry—a German (never mind the American) even now threatened his domestic peace? His newly acquired sense of duty and the stern Kitchener code of honor struggled together for an instant. He determined upon a safe middle course. Far be it from a Kitchener Hobbs to meanly retaliate upon his rival: but—to instil a proper amount of caution into the receptive mind of M. Desaye need not collide with the strictest manual of deportment.

“I—er—since you ask me, sir, I will say that I do know such a person. A—er——”

Young Hobbs grew uncomfortably hot inside his starched collar. How was he to convey the much needed warning without actual hypocrisy?

M. Desaye eyed him intently.

"Ah-h-h?" he ejaculated softly. "An' w'at, pray, do you zink of heem?"

"I don't like him, sir," said Mr. Hobbs sternly.

"*Naturellement*," agreed the Frenchman, with a shrug.

Kitchener Hobbs frowned at his boots, which were impeccably polished. Then suddenly his brow cleared: he had determined upon a bold course; one which would give him the right to speak unreservedly to the father of Madeleine.

"The fact is, sir," he blurted out, "I love your daughter. I hope you have no objections."

"You—lo-ove—*my daughter!* . . . An' you aire 'ope I've no *objection?*"

M. Desaye's tone was carefully modulated; his smile might even be construed as encouraging.

"I'm not rich," modestly admitted Mr. Hobbs; "but I'm clean and honest. I'm an Englishman, —er—my mother is American."

"*Allons!* You aire also of zat *mélange—tant bon que mauvais.*"

The Englishman reddened angrily.

"Better English-American than German-American," he said stiffly.

"But why either?" inquired M. Desaye, pleasantly impersonal. "I return to France; my

daughter also. *Enfin* she marries a Frenchman: eet ees my purpose."

"You forget that your daughter is beautiful, and that she is unprotected from the advances of even Germans in a country where, as you say, the good and the bad are mixed in pretty even proportions."

It was M. Desaye's turn to redden angrily.

"You will of your goodness explain yourself, monsieur," he said with ominous politeness.

"Do you chance to know a fellow who calls himself *Le Noir*?" asked Hoddy Hobbs, casting altruism and the Kitchener code to the winds.

"Henri Le Noir? Young—eh, of a ruddy complexion? *Certainement!* I have attempted to teach him French."

"Did you succeed, sir?"

M. Desaye drew his brows together. Many things recurred to his agile memory. He linked them swiftly into one sinister whole.

"Ah-h-h!" he exhaled lightly between closed teeth. "You aire telling me zat young man ees—I 'ave been dupe—deceive? W'at ees zis you say?"

"His name," stated Kitchener Hobbs distinctly, "is Schwartz—Heinrich Schwartz. He told me so himself. . . . He has somehow managed to win the confidence of your daughter and—you

ought to know it, sir,—he walked home with Madeleine last night.”

Dead silence followed these correlated statements. The father of Madeleine opened and closed his sinewy fingers two or three times, while the veins on his forehead swelled visibly. But he did not burst into excited recriminations. His eyes, very bright and rather unpleasant to contemplate, were fixed immovably upon an odd bit of faïence, representing a Dutch woman in a winged cap carrying balanced water-jugs.

“I fancy I’ve made a bally ass of myself,” stammered Kitchener Hobbs, hating the Dutch woman with ardor. “But I thought—it seemed to me——”

M. Desaye arose.

“Monsieur,” said he, “permit me to t’ank you. . . . Ah—regrettable that you cannot of your goodness pay me a longer visit. . . . *Bon soir, monsieur!* Goo’ night!”

His smile was pervasive, irresistible. Young Hobbs found himself wafted, as it were, on waves of good will and friendly cordiality to the front door, which closed gently—very gently—behind him.

Outside in the cool darkness Mr. Hobbs took brief counsel with himself.

“Confound a Frenchman, anyway!” he mut-

tered, and permitted himself a brief though refreshing interval of impersonal criticism. Every Briton is of course aware of the inherent insincerity of the French character, "slippery" being the favorite descriptive adjective. One never knew where to find a Frenchman, he told himself banally. Upon further reflection, during which young Hobbs passed his late conversation with M. Desaye in swift review, he perceived that his bold declaration of love for Madeleine had hopelessly muddled the situation.

"She'll hate me for telling," he concluded simply.

There was but one course of action which suggested itself under existing circumstances. He resolved to follow it.

Miss Malvina opened the door to his agitated ring.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, as she recognized her visitor, "if it ain't you, Hoddy Hobbs! Walk right in, *do*."

Mr. Hobbs inwardly resented Miss Bennett's familiar use of his mother's undignified abbreviation of the magnificent Horatio Herbert. He detested the name *Hoddy*; but he walked in, aware of Madeleine's light laugh in the room beyond.

"I got your ombrel' all safe," said Miss

Malvina. "My! I don' know what we'd a-done without it, with Ma's r'eumatiz an' all. It cert'ly was reel sweet o' you t' r'member Ma an' me. I was jest a-sayin' t' Mad'lane, 'Th' ain't many young fellers,' I says, 'would give us a thought.'"

She stood on tiptoe to whisper in his ear:

"I put in a good word f'r you, Hoddy. . . . My! ain't she a lovely girl! But you'll hev t' watch out, er Harry Schwartz 'll cut you out. . . . He's an awful nice boy, Harry is. I've knowed him sence he was in dresses—prettiest little feller y'ever see, with yellow curls down on his shoulders an' th' pinkest cheeks. My!"

"I—er—wish to speak to Miss Desaye," said Mr. Hobbs stiffly. "I was told she was here."

"I want t' know!" wondered Miss Malvina; "her pa must 'a' told you. She run in jes' f'r a minute t' bring Ma some *gaiters*—that's what she calls them little cakes with a raisin on top. . . . Here's your ombrel' an' your hat right on top of it, so's you can't forgit it. . . . Come t' beau Mad'lane home you'll be s' excited you'll likely forgit you ever owned one."

Madeleine blushed when she beheld the pale, stern face of Kitchener Hobbs. He had an air of mastery about him, which caused a vague but agreeable shiver to pass over her.

"Speak of angels," announced Miss Malvina

joyously, "an' you ketch th' flutter o' their wings. . . . Wa'n't we jest a-talkin' about Hoddy Hobbs? Set right down clost t' Ma, Hoddy, so 's she c'n hear what you're sayin'. An' I was tellin' 'em what a nice, neat boy you was, never givin' your ma any trouble, an'——"

But Mr. Hobbs declined the chair Miss Malvina kindly cleared of sewing materials for him. Madeleine had retreated toward the door with a murmured explanation which concerned her father, alone and missing her.

"Oh, I guess your pa c'n git along without you fer a spell longer," protested Ma Bennett. "Don't go yit awhile."

Miss Malvina winked knowingly at Ma. She had witnessed the exchange of glances between Hoddy Hobbs and Madeleine, with a youthful quickening of her own pulses.

"Why, Ma," she said, after she had closed the front door on the two, "ef you wa'n't blinder 'n a bat you c'd see he's a-payin' attention t' Mad'lane. Didn't you take notice how red she got when he come in? An' he fairly 'et her up with his eyes."

Miss Malvina sighed plaintively.

"My! it must be awful nice t' be young an' han'some an' have a beau. . . . I don' know 's I ever had one."

"Yes, you did, too, Malviny," contradicted Ma. "Don't you r'member th' was Obed Salter——"

"Yes," scoffed Miss Malvina, "Obed come home with me from prayer meetin' once, after his first wife died. I wouldn't look at that ol' widower, no more 'n I'd fly! No, sir! not ef he was th' las' man on earth."

"An' th' was a feller named Peck," went on Ma eagerly. "He was——"

"Oh, th' ain't no use in rakin' up them old mem'ries," interrupted Miss Malvina, almost pettishly. "I got an autograph album up in the attic; I r'member we passed it 'round in school, 'n' all the boys wrote opp'site the girls they liked best. George Beels wrote opp'site me; but then he went off an' courted Hattie Myers. But, my goodness! I'd no more 'a' married Undertaker George Beels, not ef he was th' last man——"

The loud whir of the sewing machine drowned further reminiscences. But Miss Malvina's cheeks were almost as pink as Madeleine's when she finally drew down the shades preparatory to going to bed. There was a young moon in the sky, companioned by a single bright star.

Miss Malvina sighed as she gazed. It made her think of Madeleine and Hoddy Hobbs.

"My!" she repeated wistfully, "it must be awful nice to be young an' hev a beau."

There was a light burning steadily in the window of her neighbor's house; it finally drew her eyes from a contemplation of the heavenly luminaries.

"Whatever 'd *he* do, ef Mad'lane was t' take a notion t' git married?" she asked the cat. Then she put a nail into its worn hole above the sash and shut the outer world from view, wondering as she did so what Hoddy Hobbs could be saying to Madeleine out there in the moonlight. In her youth—which seemed a great way off—Miss Malvina had never walked under moonlit trees with a young man. Now, with a curious, unaccustomed ache, she wished she had.

"Jest once—so 't I could look back an' r'member it," she murmured humbly, as she blew down the chimney of her kerosene lamp. . . .

But Madeleine had appeared wholly indifferent to her superior opportunities, as she walked quickly down Miss Malvina's graveled path. With every light footfall young Kitchener Hobbs beheld his immediate opportunity of putting himself right with her slipping away. If she should see her father first—— Yet it seemed impossible to speak.

"Oh, I say," he managed to murmur huskily,

as they reached her own gate, a short distance from Miss Malvina's.

"*Bon soir*," said Madeleine sweetly. "Qweek I make track for 'ome."

"Not yet—please! I must speak to you."

The girl paused, with the tentative air of a bird on a windswept bough.

"Oh, Madeleine, I love you—and I have told your father. But he—but I—— Wait! you must listen. I have something more to tell you."

He strove boldly to detain her; but she shut the gate between them.

"I 'ave now to 'urry," she said, retreating from his questing hand. "You 'ear zat *horloge* say nine *heures*?"

There was no denying the brazen clang of the town clock.

"You'd better not go in to your father till you've heard what I have to say," he sent after her desperately. "You'll be sorry if you do."

"*Bien!* Qweek you tell; I wait one minute."

"Madeleine—don't be so cruel. If you knew how I love you!"

"Eet ees mos' *extraordinaire*—zis lo-ve. . . . I lo-ve—you lo-ve—'e lo-ove—like *leçon* in *grammaire Anglaise*. Me—I not like to es-tudy 'er—*non!*"

She shook her head with a tantalizing laugh.

"Madeleine, why did you allow that fellow with two names to walk home with you last night?" demanded Mr. Hobbs, in a tone which he vainly strove to make elderly and impersonal. "Really, that sort of thing won't do."

"W'y not, pl-ease?"

"Because—— Can't you understand that a man who deceives his employers by using an alias isn't to be trusted? . . . Especially when he's a German—and in a munitions factory."

"'E ees not German! 'Arry—'e ees Americaine—vary much star an' stripe, zat 'Arry. You zink I am *bébé*?"

"So you call him Harry," commented Mr. Hobbs grimly. "Why not Heinrich? That's his real name—*Heinrich Schwartz!*"

"An' 'is ozzer name—pl-ease?"

"*Le Noir*. The fellow actually has the impudence to call himself *Le Noir* at the Plant. . . . Of course, I told your father. I had to do it. . . . Can't you see? Schwartz may be a dangerous fellow."

Young Kitchener Hobbs' voice shook with two-fold passion: Madeleine, illusive as mist, seemed about to vanish into the night.

"Hear me out!" he called after her. . . .
"You shall!"

"Vary much I 'ear you; Mees Malvina an' my

fat'er, *aussi*, so loud you holler. Me—I am not deaf 's pos'."

"But you seem so far away. . . . Listen, Madeleine—it is because I love you—because I want you to be my wife—I can't bear to see you deceived by——"

She was gone. There could be no doubt of it. The door opened, showing an oblong of yellow lamplight; then closed. For an irresolute minute he stood staring at the little old house beneath its canopy of swaying trees. Suppose he should storm that closed door—should insist upon being heard—in French, in English or in the absurd patois Madeleine chose to speak? . . . After all, what more could he say? He had at least made his motives clear. And from his present intrenched position as the declared lover of Madeleine he would not easily be dislodged. To Harry Schwartz he gave but a single disdainful thought: "He is the sort of bounder," said Kitchener Hobbs, "who attempts to cover his misdeeds with the stars and stripes and calls himself an American!"

XXVI

MRS. PETTIBONE had just taken up her child from his afternoon nap, in the moist, pink, entirely adorable condition peculiar to a baby going on seven months. After she had kissed, cuddled, and cooed over him in a hopelessly old-fashioned manner, she knocked on the study door. Mrs. Pettibone had never given up this modest custom, when thus intruding upon her husband's solitude. He did not at once answer; and boldly—very boldly—his son upon her arm, she repeated her summons.

"Why don't you walk right in, Miss Philura?" demanded Mr. Pettibone's laughing voice from within.

Mrs. Pettibone blushed. She always blushed when he called her Miss Philura, thus reminding her of all the sweet and wonderful happenings of a not distant past.

"I wanted you to see him, Silas," she said. "He's *wonderful* today! And you know, Silas, he'll never be just six months and four days old again."

"True," admitted Mr. Pettibone. "I hadn't thought of it in that way before."

"I think of it every day," she sighed: "he's growing up so fast, Silas."

"But we want him to grow up, don't we? We wouldn't like to see him atrophied in babyhood, would we?"

"Of course not! but he's *so* sweet just as he is. . . . Look at his eyes, Silas! He's looking at you, see! he wants you to take him and play with him."

Mr. Pettibone promptly abandoned Volume IV of a series of commentaries on the Pauline Epistles in favor of the baby, who began to gurgle and kick with delight as his father held out his arms for him.

"Just six months and four days old this morning!" repeated Mrs. Pettibone, gazing at her treasures in the shabby armchair with unconcealed delight. "I can hardly believe it, Silas. . . . If any one had told me five years ago—— Hark! Was that the door-bell? It doesn't ring very well lately. . . ."

He heard her voice in greeting, which seemed to convey a note of surprise. Then the parlor door closed. Mr. Pettibone gazed in some perplexity at his son. Surely, it was a man's voice he had heard in the passage. . . . Five minutes

elapsed and still she did not return. The baby, tiring of the minister's silver watch and of his persistently offered key-ring—which the infant finally cast upon the floor with a shrill little yelp of displeasure—was becoming somewhat uninteresting as compared with Volume IV of the Pauline Commentaries. Mr. Pettibone paced the length of his study several times, inanely repeating "Pretty—pretty!" in the presence of his rows of theological books. The infant quite evidently failed to appreciate this form of entertainment, for he began to howl lustily. The infant's clothing, moreover, displayed a strange tendency to creep up about his ears; in vain the distracted Mr. Pettibone strove to pat and pull these inchoate garments into place, as he had seen his wife do a score of times. Finally in despair he deposited the small demoralized bundle of muslin and flannel on the floor, and stood looking down at it dubiously. The minister could think of no adequate reason for the infant's displeasure, but there appeared to be little doubt of it in view of his screams.

Mrs. Pettibone opened the door upon his discomfiture.

"Why, Silas Pettibone!" she exclaimed, "what *are* you doing to the baby? Come here to mother, darling!"

There was implied censure in her voice and the way in which she skillfully righted the infant's garments and hushed his abominable crying, which was not meekly to be borne.

"I was not *doing* anything to the baby, my dear Philura," protested Mr. Pettibone, with unwonted spirit. "I merely held on to him as long as I was able, and then——"

"Never mind, Silas," said his wife, with the new and superior forbearance he had noted in her manner of late. "Please come and speak to Mr. Desaye. I have been talking with him—he wanted to see me; but I thought perhaps we ought to consult you. . . . Besides, I heard the baby."

Mr. Pettibone gazed at his wife with honest amazement. She had "thought perhaps"—well, well!

M. Desaye, in an immaculate frock-coat and striped trousers, a black pearl in his scarf and a flower in his buttonhole, presented a pleasant contrast to the somewhat disheveled minister.

"The baby," said Mrs. Pettibone, "wanted *me*. . . . Now I think we can go on with our little talk. Possibly Mr. Pettibone can advise you better than I about your daughter—though I am sure everything will be all right."

"My Madeleine 'as no mot'er," said M.

Desaye gravely: "'ad it been God's will zat madame, my wife, survive to now eet would not 'ave been necessaire to consult es-tranger. I regret ze gr-rand trouble I make wiz you; but eet ees impossible to avoid—— You un'erstan' me, is eet not?"

"Harry Schwartz has been making love to Madeleine," explained Mrs. Pettibone, very pink and smiling. "I've been telling Mr. Desaye that Harry is a splendid boy; we've always known him. . . . He thought Harry was a German spy!"

"A German spy?" repeated Mr. Pettibone; "oh, no—no, indeed! Let me assure you, sir: Harry Schwartz is one of our own Sunday-School boys. He is above suspicion of anything like that."

"But—'e ees of German bl-lood," persisted the Frenchman, polite but unyielding. "You will of your kin'ness pardon me eef I say zat ees for me *suffisamment*. Beyond, he 'as also deceive me: I zink 'im Huguenot, name of Le Noir. I fin' 'im German, name of Schwartz—— What will you?"

M. Desaye's eyes, shoulders, and outspread hands were eloquent of disbelief: but his expression suddenly changed to one of amazement and alarm.

"*Ecoutez!*" he exclaimed sharply, "what ees zat?"

All three occupants of the parsonage parlor sprang to their feet: That loud, booming explosion which had shaken the old house from rafter to cellar—what was it?

Mr. Pettibone was the first to recover himself.

"I am told they are at work constructing a new state road some miles away," he began; "it was probably necessary blasting. I believe——"

But again the terrible sound interrupted the minister's explanation. Then followed many short and sharp explosions, like the discharge of volleys of musketry.

"Oh! it must be something awful!" murmured Mrs. Pettibone, clasping her baby closer.

M. Desaye stood with bent head, the frown with which he had listened to the minister's somewhat vague defense of Harry Schwartz deepening between his eyes. The sound of the explosions continued: now heavy, dull, shattering noises; again that sudden bursting crackle like machine guns in action. . . . Then he spoke one French word, which the world pronounces as it will:

"*Munitions!*"

The two men, moved by a single impulse, rushed out of doors. But Mrs. Pettibone, her

baby in her arms, hurriedly climbed the stair to the nursery. The terrible sounds continued, but in this quiet sunny room, with its small, pendant garments and its white furniture, one somehow felt safe from immediate catastrophe. She had not comprehended M. Desaye's laconic explanation, and in her confusion she began mechanically to gather the baby's garments into a neat bundle. . . . Perhaps they would be obliged to fly. Other women the world over had been forced into the open, their babies in their arms. . . . Something terrible and unexpected was happening. She must be ready. . . . Oh, yes, and extra socks and handkerchiefs for Mr. Pettibone—and would he need his pajamas? She strove to think calmly. . . . Where was the baby's talcum powder? A sound of trampling feet on the stair mingled with a fusillade of frightful explosions.

"Well, fer th' land sake, Mis' Pettibone!" exclaimed the strident voice of Mrs. Wessells, from the door. "Ain't this th' livin' limit! I was a-washin' t' home t'day—this bein' a Thursday; an' I hed m' han's in th' suds, when in runs Georgie: 'Ma,' says he, 'th' works is blowin' up,' he says. 'What works?' I says, 'fer goodness sake, Georgie!' 'Why, them bomb works out b' th' swamp, ma,' he says. . . . He's ont' everythin', my Georgie is. . . . I tell you, Mis'

Pettibone, th' can't nothin' take place without him knowin' it, first off. He's th' smartest boy—our Georgie. . . . Why, what 'n creation you doin'—packin' up? 'Tain't goin' t' do no great harm in th' village, Mis' Pettibone. But I'll bet th' swamp 'll be chuck full o' r'mains—after th' bombs is all fired off. . . . Here they come now, a-runnin' like a pack o' lun'tics! Look, Mis' Pettibone! fer pity sake, jes' see 'em!"

The minister's wife needed no second bidding; the sound of hundreds of running feet drew her to the window. Workmen from the plant, fleeing from before the terrific bombardment meant for others, were hurrying past the house in small irregular squads. A confused rabble of women and crying children bringing up the rear. They had passed the danger zone, but they were still running, their eyes fixed and staring, their feet striking the pavement with dull heavy thuds.

"Well, I guess I'd better be goin' along," said Mrs. Wessells, gathering her shawl under her chin with an air of keen enjoyment. "Thinks s' I, I'll stop in first off an' see if anythin' hit th' pars'nage, yit. . . . Land! if there ain't Harry Schwartz scorchin' along on his bike! I didn't know as he worked out there; did you? But I guess he must of; his cloe's is all black."

Mrs. Pettibone turned from the window, her

face pale and anxious. She was recalling confusedly certain scraps of her conversation with M. Desaye. He had insisted that Harry Schwartz was working at the munitions plant under an assumed name. . . . But it must be time for baby's bottle; little whimpering sounds from the crib reminded her of the paramount fact. She followed Mrs. Wessells downstairs. In the hall Mr. Pettibone was talking with two or three excited neighbors; the house seemed suddenly full of people. . . . The baby was crying upstairs. . . . Mrs. Pettibone found herself trying to comfort a distracted woman, who declared that her son had been killed. . . . And still the terrible sounds of exploding shells rent the air. . . .

No one in Innisfield learned the full extent of the disaster that day nor the next. The detonations continued fitfully during the afternoon and well on into the night, when a dull red glow streaked with brilliant arcs of light revealed the spot where the munitions works had stood. Mounted police from Boston and fire engines from near-by towns invaded the streets, and by daybreak a tentative effort was made to round up the workmen. It was thought at first that many were missing; but as the hours passed it appeared that several who had run blindly from the scene of the disaster had become entangled

in the more distant fastnesses of the swamp, from which they emerged covered with slime, their clothing torn to shreds, but otherwise uninjured. . . .

On Sunday morning Mr. Pettibone, pale but calm, in the face of a large and excited congregation, rendered heartfelt thanks to God for the almost miraculous preservation of human life during the late terrifying calamity. That not one of the hundreds of workmen employed had met with sudden death was due to the extraordinary presence of mind and bravery of one young man—so Mr. Pettibone informed the Almighty, and incidentally his congregation. After a time-honored custom “the long prayer” was devoted to a masterly recapitulation of recent events, previously unknown to mortals, but without reasonable doubt stored up in the divine intelligence from the foundation of the world.

At its close Mrs. Buckthorn was seen to nudge her neighbor, Miss Electa Pratt:

“Who’d he mean?” she whispered: “what young man?”

“I guess it must ‘a’ been that young Hobbs,” Miss Electa whispered back from behind her hymn-book; “they say he telephoned all over the plant after Sadie Banks fainted dead away, settin’ in her chair. After he’d got everybody on the

run he drug her out an' r'vived her an' she come home 's lively 's a cricket. But *he* didn't come home for mos' two hours. Most everybody thought he was killed. His mother took on till you c'd hear her way down in th' store."

As these circumstantial details were already known to Mrs. Buckthorn, she listened without comment, her large countenance composed to a pious rigidity befitting the time and occasion. It was not until the benediction had been pronounced and the organ burst forth in vague triumph that she turned again to Miss Pratt.

"I suppose," she said in a hollow voice, "that you've heard the ter-rible intelligence about Har-ry Schwartz?"

"My gracious me!" cried Miss Pratt, pausing round-eyed in the act of buttoning her jacket. "Was he *killed*?"

Mrs. Buckthorn shook her head.

"I al-most wish I c'd say 'th' Lord's will be done' t' *that* question, Electa," she syllabled slowly. "No, he ain't dead: he's been a-rested an' he's *in—jail*."

"Harry Schwartz—*arrested!* in jail!" shrilled Miss Pratt. "Why, I run in t' Mis' Schwartzes only las' night after supper to borrow a cup of sugar, an' she didn't say anything about Harry's being *arrested*."

Mrs. Buckthorn continued solemnly to oscillate her massive headgear. Out of the corner of her eye she beheld Mrs. Obed Salter, Mrs. Undertaker Beels, and Mrs. Henry Pratt advancing down the aisle: they had not heard the news.

"No, Electa," she said distinctly, "Mrs. Schwartz was not a-ware of her son's disgrace at that hour. I understan' Har-ry was pre-parin' to re-tire for the night, when——"

"I s'pose they had to put reg'lar *han'cuffs* ont' him," offered Miss Pratt. She also had noted the approaching bevy of ladies, and framed her comment thus dramatically with purpose.

"Fer pity sake, what's happened now?" demanded Mrs. Salter excitedly. "Who's been han'cuffed? I ain't heard a word."

"Nor me, neither," chimed in Mrs. Pratt.

Mrs. Undertaker Beels, as became her husband's gloomy trade, preserved a non-committal silence. But her eyes under their black lashes were active and observant.

Mrs. Buckthorn sighed heavily.

"I suppose," she said, with an air of reluctance, "that we can hardly hope to keep the matter to ourselves—much as we should be g-lad to spare the young man's family. . . . They do

say his pictur', took in jail, will be in all th' papers t'morrow. . . . My! My! when I think how, durin' our late bl-essed r'vival, I set an' watched that young man—an' him a-lookin' serious fer th' first time in his life; an' of how I went pers'nally an' labored with him, face t' face, doin' m' prayerful best to dror him t' th' mourner's pew; an' how——"

But the flood of question and comment which had been gathering in force could no longer be stayed; even the taciturn Mrs. Beels insisted upon being heard.

"George Beels knew of Harry Schwartz's arrest early this morning," she stated. "Mr. Schwartz was around trying to get bail."

"What 'd he do?" demanded the other women in chorus, turning with one accord to Mrs. Beels. "Why did they arrest him?"

"Ladies!" spoke Mrs. Buckthorn loudly and authoritatively, "if you'll listen to *me*——"

But Mrs. Beels triumphantly held the floor. She could be depended upon to be brief and to the point, without reservation or rhetorical embellishment.

"They *say* he blew up the plant," she said bluntly. "But I know he didn't; so there!"

"*La-dies!*" intoned Mrs. Buckthorn, "*I* can tell you something *awful*, if you'll pay attention

to me: that poor, mis-guided young man—who will undoubtedly be *hung* in the near future—was a-rested *because*——”

Mr. Pettibone's tall black-coated figure suddenly appeared in the center of the excited group. Not one of the women had noticed his approach, but its effect was magical. Even Mrs. Buckthorn became silent for a moment. In that moment the minister spoke:

“I wish you would all disperse quietly to your homes,” he said in low, even tones. “I see you have heard of the terrible accusation which has been lodged against a young man who has grown up in our midst—one of our own children. I believe him to be innocent of the horrible crime laid at his door, and until he has been proven guilty he is entitled to that belief by the rulings of common law.”

Mrs. Buckthorn wagged her bonnet, decorated with a plenitude of black beads as hard and soulless as her eyes.

“As t' that, I guess each an' every one of us is en-titled t' our private o-pinion, Mis-ter Pettibone,” she said acidly. “An' when it comes to——”

“Let me implore you to keep that opinion as private as possible, Mrs. Buckthorn,” interrupted the minister.

His gaze, anxious and troubled, passed quickly from one plump, matronly face to another; then his head drooped.

"The tide of public opinion seems to be setting strongly against the lad," he said slowly. "Let us hope that the members of this church will entertain the reasonable doubt, and give voice to none but charitable comments. . . . Go home, I beg of you, and pray that the truth may become speedily apparent."

The rustle of Sabbath skirts and the sound of hushed footfalls ceased at length, and silence, broken only by the sighing of the wind, brooded the sanctuary. Still the tall spare figure of the minister stood motionless, his hands folded loosely upon the pew-front.

"O Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations: before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world—even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God!"

The majestic words rose to his lips unbidden; in them was the strong comfort his soul craved:—"even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God."

As he passed, at length, down the aisle he almost stumbled upon a small figure, kneeling there in the gloom of the projecting gallery. The

next instant he had recognized the young French girl, Madeleine Desaye, her face stained with weeping.

"Me—I 'ave come," she whispered, "to pray *le bon Dieu*—for 'Arry!"

XXVII

HARRY SCHWARTZ sat on a wooden bench in the Innisfield jail. It was Sunday: he heard the church bells ringing. After awhile he got up and looked out of the barred window high up in the wall. People were walking along the streets. At first he did not associate himself with the fact that nearly every one looked up at the jail as they walked along. Then a slow, painful crimson surged up into his brain, forcing the tears to his eyes. He went back to his bench and sat down. It seemed a long time since yesterday morning. . . . He forced himself to go back to the moment when he had stood by the kitchen table watching his mother cutting sandwiches for his lunch.

"Harry," she said, "I wish you'd give up working 'way out there at the munitions plant. I worry about you dreadfully."

"Why should you worry, mother?"

It was a comment rather than a question. He knew well enough why his mother worried. It had all been talked over a score of times in the

last month. But while she spread the thick slices of home-made bread with plenty of butter and added a generous filling of minced chicken she told him all her reasons once more. . . . Harry swallowed childishly as he remembered how good those sandwiches had tasted at noon. . . . The conversation ended as usual: Harry fastened his lunch-box to the handle of his bicycle, kissed his mother good-by, and sped away. He intended to stop working in the munitions plant as soon as his building lot was paid for. After that he could borrow the money to build his home. But in the meantime his weekly pay envelopes, bearing the name *Le Noir*, worried him. At least once every week—generally on pay day—Harry found himself going over the whole matter with himself: *Le Noir* was merely a French translation of Schwartz; he meant no harm by accepting Madeleine's smooth substitute for his harsh German name. He did his work honestly and well. What possible harm could there be in the small deception? There wasn't any harm in it! But Harry guessed he'd better stop working at the plant before long. He hated to have his mother worry. Of course he had never showed her his pay envelope with the name *Le Noir* on it. He knew about what she would say; and very likely she would cry, which was worse. . . .

He had not seen Madeleine since the night he told her he loved her, though he had studied his French every night and had learned the inadequate word for wife.

He got up from his bench again and went to the window; his head ached when he thought of Madeleine. . . . Looking down into the familiar street, which somehow looked unfamiliar seen from this barred window, his thoughts went monotonously on: nothing out of the ordinary had happened till afternoon. Everybody was working as usual. He saw Hobbs counting shells about half-past one. At two o'clock he met him crossing the yard. Harry had not spoken to Hobbs since the night of the revival. . . . Why should he speak to Hobbs? The fellow owed him an apology. . . . It might have been half an hour later when he heard a slight explosion and saw a sudden flare-up of brilliant light in the filling-shed. He was on his way to investigate the reason for this when somebody shouted to him to run. . . . Suddenly the yard was full of men, running, cursing, shouting. Harry looked around for Hobbs: to his surprise he found himself thinking of Hobbs with keen anxiety. Then came the first heavy explosion. Harry jumped upon his wheel, which he had left by the gate, and rode swiftly toward home. Something hit him in

the back of the head as he went, but he did not notice it: he was thinking of his mother, who would be "worrying dreadfully." He must let her know he was all right. . . .

The church bells had stopped ringing by now. Harry wondered dully if his father and mother had gone to church. He pictured them there in the fourth pew from the pulpit, where he seemed to see himself, a very little boy with yellow curls on his shoulders, looking at Deacon Scrimger's shining bald head two seats in front. Sometimes, when the sermon was long, his mother would give him a pink and white peppermint drop out of her pocket. He would grow very sleepy after the peppermint was eaten. How comfortable his mother's smooth silken lap felt as he laid his head upon it! After that the preacher's voice seemed to come peacefully from a great way off: then it ceased altogether. . . . A queer hard lump in Harry's throat ached intolerably as he thought about it. . . . His mother had cried when they took him away last night. They had come for him just as he was going to bed after the "nice warm bath" she insisted upon. The covers of his bed were turned down and the breeze from the open windows fluttered the muslin curtains.

"I'm glad it isn't any worse," he told her,

when she exclaimed over the matted hair at the back of his head.

He had forgotten all about the something that hit him on his way out of the plant. His mother called his father to look at the tiny scalp wound. She wondered if there ought to be a stitch taken, and should they call the doctor? It was just then that the door-bell rang sharply. . . .

The sound of a key grating in the lock roused him. He turned his head and saw his father coming into his cell, followed by another man.

"Well, Harry, my boy," said his father, with an affectation of great cheerfulness, "how did you make out last night?"

Harry made no answer. He was looking at the other man. He had known him by sight for a long time. The man's name was Calvin S. Northrup. He was a lawyer. Mr. Northrup returned Harry's look sharply. Then he rubbed his hands, which were dry and bony.

"A bad business—a very bad business," he said, and glanced around the cell. . . . "Hey? Water coming in through the ceiling! Hr-rumpp! Roof wants repairing. . . . Well, now, let's look into this business."

He sat down on the wooden chair and again stared at Harry.

"I've engaged Mr. Northrup to defend you, Harry," explained Mr. Schwartz.

"Just so, just so," confirmed the lawyer. "Now then, *don't* incriminate yourself, young man!"

He wagged a long, yellow finger at Harry.

"Don't forget what I tell you. The prosecution will likely put you through the third degree. I'm told they're preparing their case for the preliminary hearing, which may take place tomorrow. But until you're proved guilty——"

"I'm not guilty," said Harry, with some violence. "I didn't blow up the plant. Why should I?"

"That's just the line of defense Calvin S. Northrup intends to follow," approved the lawyer. "Why should you blow up the plant? Exactly! Hum—er—now you'll have to be careful what you say. They'll try to catch you with all sorts of tricky questions. They'll endeavor to mix you up, bewilder you; but you just stick to that one statement: You don't know anything about the cause of the explosion. You went to your work, as usual: always faithful. Didn't hear or see anything out of the common till——"

"But I did," interrupted Harry. "I saw——"

Mr. Northrup's active eyebrows and waving forefinger halted Harry's eager explanation.

"Why shouldn't I tell?" asked Harry, bewildered. "I saw——"

"Young man, you didn't *see* anything and you didn't *hear* anything until *after*—mark my words carefully—*until after* you left the plant. You got out at the first alarm. Now then paste that in your hat."

Mr. Northrup wrinkled his lean face into the semblance of a smile.

"Fact is," he said, sinking his voice to a whisper, "you've got yourself into a devilish fix, young fellow. I'd a leetle rather your father had gone elsewhere for counsel. But, seeing your family has been resident in our town for a considerable while, and you yourself bear a good general reputation, Calvin S. Northrup has undertaken the case. But you'll have to follow his advice to the letter, or he'll drop it."

Harry's father wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Guess you'd better do as he says, Harry," he said huskily. "Mr. Calvin S. Northrup ought to know what's——"

"Calvin S. Northrup *does know!*" exploded the lawyer, expanding his narrow chest. "My experience as a criminal lawyer stands behind every word I have said. . . . Let me tell you: last year I was sent for from Boston to defend

a young man accused of murder in the first degree. I advised him, as I have advised you. . . . Did he profit by it? No!"

"Did you—get him off, sir?" inquired Mr. Schwartz, after a heavy pause.

Mr. Northrup eyed his client with a frown.

"The accused was as guilty as hell," he stated. "I saw it the minute I laid eyes on him. It stuck out all over him; and he *would* talk about himself. Couldn't stop him. . . . Executed last week. Not my fault."

Mr. Northrup glanced sidewise at Harry, as if to note the effect of his words.

"*Now* maybe you'll watch your step," he added jocularly. "Of course that alias of yours is a bad bit of evidence, and I'm afraid we can't disprove it: name on company's blanks in your own handwriting: employment clerk ready to swear it was signed in his presence. . . . Clerk might be proved insane; though I shall, if forced to it, prove you insane. . . . Insanity in the family, and that sort of thing. Mind you don't deny it, either of you."

Harry's face reddened.

"See here!" he said thickly, "you've got another guess coming about me. I didn't blow up the plant; but I did sign under the name of Le Noir. I did it because they weren't taking on

Germans. I'm an American, but I've got a German name. . . . You may as well give up my case right now. I shan't try to lie out of anything I've done."

"Harry," said Mr. Schwartz in a broken voice, "you ought to be thinking of your poor mother. She—she's sick, Harry. I didn't tell you before, but——"

The young man turned violently upon his father.

"You—you think I did it?" he cried in a shocked voice.

"Come, come, my lad, don't get excited," exhorted Mr. Northrup. "We'll do the best we can for you, depend upon it. But we're going to leave you to think it over; yes, to—er—reconsider. You're no fool, I can see that. . . . Now, Mr. Schwartz, we've plenty to do. Nothing to be gained by further talk with the accused."

Harry did not look at his father, as the two men turned to go out. . . . The key grated in the lock. It seemed to be grating in his soul. He realized now that half unconsciously he had been waiting for his father's strong interference: of course everybody would know he was innocent of the monstrous charge against him. He would go home to his Sunday dinner, somewhat soiled with the disgrace of his night in jail, somewhat sheep-

ish under the curious eyes of the neighbors, but ready to laugh ruefully over the unhappy blunder of the local police. The lump in his throat hurt him cruelly as he thought of his mother. He wondered dully if she had found his pay envelope, marked with the name Le Noir. Why hadn't he told her all about it?

The town clock struck twelve, after a dreary hour spent in pacing up and down the narrow limits of his cell. The jailer brought him his dinner on a battered tin plate. Somebody—it might have been another prisoner—tossed in a newspaper. It contained an account of the explosion. Harry saw a villainous picture of himself under big head-lines: "German plot unearthed! Chief conspirator working in Merks Plant under assumed name! Other arrests may follow!"

He forced himself to read the page, while the Sunday dinner on the battered tin plate developed rims of solidified grease about its slabs of meat and dingy mounds of vegetables. Harry drank a cup of muddy coffee, and read on. He saw himself described as a big, hulking fellow, with a sinister eye. . . . He had been for some time in the pay of the German government; his expenditures proved it. . . . Short work would doubtless be made of the Schwartz case, there being not a shadow of doubt of the guilt of the accused.

The keeper looked at Harry with a sort of respect, when he came to take away the untasted dinner.

"*Some* job fer a young feller like you," he observed. "But o' course you didn't do it b' your lonesome. I'd peach on m' pals higher up, if I was you."

"I didn't do it," said Harry wearily.

"No? . . . Nice pictur' they got o' you in th' paper. . . . Say, I guess you'll find your appetite b' t'morrow. Better eat while you c'n git real victuals: they won't treat you s' well up state."

When Harry failed to respond to this playful allusion to his undoubted fate, the friendly official chuckled.

"Take it from me, you innercent guys wins th' bun! Say, you got a real baby stare, ain't you? . . . But don't you try no hunger strike on yours truly. I got your number all right, young feller!"

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when Miss Malvina Bennett called. Harry had abandoned his introspective studies and was gazing out of the window at the procession of Sunday pedestrians. He had ceased to notice their upward glances at his window. It seemed a long time since he had talked with his father and Mr. Northrup. . . . Of course everybody had read the papers. . . .

He turned a lack-luster eye upon Miss Bennett, as she hesitated before his door.

"Sweetheart t' see you," announced his jailer facetiously. "I ain't a-going t' look."

"You go 'long, Ed Lucas!" Miss Bennett exhorted him. "I ain't seen an awful sight o' you sence you ust t' steal apples offen my sweetening tree. I guess you was about th' meanest boy in town in them days, an' you ain't changed much, 'xcept yer whiskers."

Upon the retreat of the discomfited official Miss Malvina went up to Harry and laid her hands upon his shoulders.

"I ain't a-goin' t' pity you none," she said briskly. "Ef the's anythin' I hate on top th' ground it's the pison sentiment folks call *sympathy*; but I will say this: I believe in you right down t' the ground, Harry. You may 'ave made a mistake—mos' folks do, one time er another. But I *know* you're *all right*. Ma Bennett thinks th' same as me, an' so does Mad'lane Dassay an' her pa."

Harry's unhappy face brightened.

"Does she?" he asked eagerly.

"Meanin' Ma Bennett, o' course," chuckled Miss Malvina. "Now you jes' set down; 'n' you 'n' me 'll take counsel t'gether, es it says in th' Psalms. But first off, ain't you hungry? I'll

bet Mis' Lucas can't cook a decent meal o' victuals t' save her life. When th' two of 'em got ap-p'inted t' this 'ere jail I says t' Ma, 'Malefactors,' I says, 'll git all 'at's comin' t' 'em jes' from eatin' 'Liza Jane Lucases cookin'.' Anyhow, I brought you some ham sandwiches an' a lemon pie an' some o' Mad'lane's gaiters. She brought 'em over t' me this mornin' a-purpose. But when I come in an' asked fer you I hed t' laugh. 'What you got in your basket, Miss Malvina?' says Ed Lucas, kind of important. 'We hev t' be keerful,' says he, 'what goes in t' desprit criminals.' 'Well, Ed,' I says t' him, 'I guess you done well t' take up your res'dunce in jail on your own hook. It's where you b'long,' I says. 'Es f'r desprit criminals,' I says, 'I ain't got no dealin's with 'em. I've come t' see Harry Schwartz, an' I brought him somethin' fit t' eat, knowin' full well he wouldn't git no relishin' victuals here.' With that I opens up my basket 'n' showed him this 'ere pie. Land! You c'd fairly see Ed's mouth waterin'. . . . That's right! jes' you pitch int' them sandwiches. Y' don't want t' git all run down an' tuckered out. I tell you, you got t' keep a stiff upper lip. It's a-goin' t' come out *all* right."

Miss Malvina beamed upon Harry like sun upon the frozen ground. In the generous warmth

of her friendly presence he swallowed the aching lump in his throat and ate the sandwiches to the last crumb, and likewise the pie, with its delicately fragrant lemon filling.

"That tastes like mother's pie," he said wistfully.

"'Tis," confirmed Miss Malvina. "I went in t' see your Ma. I heerd she was jes' prostrate. An' 'twas 'n' awful shock havin' her boy took off th' way they done. . . . Th' wa'n't a mite of excuse f'r it, neither. 'Twas them measly Boston d'tectives 'n' th' local p'lice. They feel kind o' cheap ef they can't arrest somebody. Most anybody 'll do, so's they git their names in print. . . . R'minds me of an old dog we ust t' hev' at home: he'd chase a squirrel till he was all beat out; then he'd fetch a stick t' Pa 'n' lay it down afront o' him, tail a-waggin' s' much 's t' say, 'Ain't I some dog?' . . . Your Ma 's feelin' better. But I says t' her, 'Fer pity sake, don't go over there, 'n' cry over Harry. It'd take th' tuck all out of 'im,' I says. So she's a-goin' t' brace up, same's I told her; an' I guess you'll see her b' t'morrow. . . . Eat a gaiter, do! Mad'lane 'll be awful pleased when I tell her."

"They are too pretty to eat," protested Harry, sighing over the delicate scalloped cakes. "I suppose she—she must be——"

"She says it's *all* her fault," interrupted Miss Bennett. "She give you that name in th' be-ginnin'—fer a kind of a joke on her pa. . . . 'N' I can tell you, I give *him* a real good goin' over this mornin': 'Ef you'd asked *me*,' I says t' him, 'I c'd a-told you first off 'at Harry Schwartz was about th' nicest boy in this 'ere town. . . . An' th' simple idee o' tryin' t' keep a sweet posy of a girl like Mad'lane from havin' beaux. Why,' I says, 'you might 's well try t' keep th' summer from comin' right along after June first. 'Tain't natur',' I says t' 'im. . . . He's a reel nice man, even ef he is fur'n, an' 's fer Mad'lane——Well! ef she ain't peaches 'n' cream I don' know who is."

"She'll never look at me again," sighed Harry.

"You c'n jes' bet she will. Mad'lane's got plenty o' grit 'n' gumption, an' she c'n see through a hole in th' wall, even ef th' p'lice is blinder 'n bats. Now you jes' chirk right up, Harry. The Lord ain't forgot you, 'n' we ain't, neither."

Miss Malvina fumbled in her pocket, which for greater safety was hung amid the folds of her petticoat.

"Land! I hope I ain't mislaid it . . ." she murmured. "No: here 'tis. It's a note from Mad'lane. Thinks I, I won't mention it first

off, f'r fear you wouldn't relish y'r victuals thinkin' about it. Mebbe it 'll pass th' time away, studyin' it out. . . . She'd a-come right along with me; but her pa wa'n't willin', 'n' I don' know 's I blame 'im none. You wouldn't want Ed Lucas a-gawpin' at her."

Harry's big brown hand trembled as he reached for the small envelope bearing his name.

Miss Malvina picked up her basket.

"Now, don't you git down-hearted," was her final exhortation. "Ef th's anythin' in holdin' th' thought, like Mis' Rev'ren' Pettibone—her 'twas Philura Rice—says, you'll be out o' here b'fore you know it. Ev'rybody 'at c'n wag a jaw is prayin' fer you t' beat th' cars. . . . Now, Ed Lucas, I'm a-goin'. . . . I c'n see 'at you feel all swelled up with pride t' be lockin' 'n' unlockin' your fellow-creeters, like they was circus animals. But you want t' r'member pride goes b'fore a fall—an' not s' fur ahead of it, neither."

Harry did not hear the objectionable sound of the key in the lock on this occasion: he was reading Madeleine's letter in the light from his barred window. It was worth going to jail for—that letter! Harry read it, then folded it carefully and bestowed it in the breast pocket of his coat, where it appeared to diffuse a roseate glow through his entire being. But it must needs be

read again and yet again, while quite unnoticed the town clock struck four, and after an insignificant period five. And yet Madeleine had only written this:

“*Mon ami*, I have grate mad to myself *parceque* you suffaire. Me—I have weep some tear from a past time when I see you. I explain all to *mon père*. He say to me, ‘Madeleine, you are more *simple comme une enfant*: I translate for you to say I know nossing no more an *bébé*. I am mos’ *triste* all times, *specialement* when I cause to bake *les petit gâteaux aux raisins de Corinthe*—you translate by eat wis teeth *les gâteaux*, which I sen you by very good neighbor, Miss Malvina. Fannie word *neighbor*. I look for him in *dictionnaire*. All times I study my *dictionnaire* very severe, all word astonishing like *wife*, I achieve more queek zan scat. Beyond, I am also arduous to my *grammaire Anglaise*, an’ meditate such *verbe*—like I love you—you love me—we one another love. Some elegant nice *verbe*. I have now to desist from write. I make to come to you mos respectful regard—very much friendly. Adieu,

“MADELEINE.”

Grandfather Schwartz, a package of choice Frankfurter sausages and pretzels under his arm, was obliged to announce his presence with more than his usual explosiveness before the prisoner turned from his window, where he appeared

deeply engrossed with an insignificant scrap of paper.

"Hello, grandfather," said Harry, almost cheerfully.

"*Wie geht's*, son," responded the old man, with a cautious glance into the corridor. "How you vas—heh?"

Harry carefully bestowed the letter in the left-hand breast pocket of his coat.

"I guess I'm all right, grandfather," he replied, with a notable access of gloom, "as right as I can be in this hole."

"Ach! too pad," growled the old man, shaking his head.

He sat down heavily on the bench.

"A pad pizniz," he muttered. "Hr-rumph!"

After a longish pause, during which he gazed at Harry with an odd grimace, he added:

"I see your vater, son. He tell me."

Harry stared at the floor.

"I guess they'll find out they're mistaken before long," he offered miserably.

"You pet!" agreed his grandfather, with unlooked for buoyancy. "Zo I myself find; I vas wrong mit you, Heinrich. You are goot poy."

He pulled Harry down to a seat beside him on the bench.

"Ach, let me look at you, Heinrich!"

Harry submitted to his grandfather's arm about his shoulders.

"I—I'm glad if you aren't ashamed of me, grandfather," he murmured. "Father said—I—I thought—he didn't seem to understand."

"Ach! he mage me sick: he haf no *Verständniss*—my son Heinrich."

The old man stooped his booming whisper to Harry's ear.

"You vill not go to prison, son! *Nein!* You haf learn much to me addentive—heh? Goot poy!"

Harry stared at his grandfather, a doubt of his complete sanity crossing his mind. His mother had succumbed under the shock of his arrest, and now, too evidently, the old man had been crazed by it. He must attempt to divert his attention.

"Have you seen mother today?" he asked anxiously.

Old Heinrich shrugged his shoulders.

"*Ya*," he drawled, and shook his head.

"She is *unzurechnungsfachig*."

Harry was silent. He was not quite sure what *unzurechnungsfachig* meant.

"Not a *Mutter* for a *Deutsch Helden*. You vill see, son, vat I do. I pet you from our Kaiser obdain *eiserne Kreuz*: you know vat I

mean? . . . *Nein?* Ach! you are von pig fool, Heinrich, you no speak Deutsch. Vell, I learn you von *vort: eisernes Kreuz*—vat you call iron cross—so? You mage von pig victory for your *vaterland*, Heinrich.”

Harry was now miserably certain that his grandfather had lost his reason. He wriggled uneasily in the strong grip of the old man’s arm about his shoulders.

“I guess you’d better go home, grandfather,” he said remorsefully. “I—I hope things will be cleared up by tomorrow. . . . Of course you know I didn’t——”

“Sure, Heinrich: no blace to talk. I know—I know! I go away, an’ you see vot I do. . . . In Boston we haf friends. I tell vot I know about my prave *Enkel*, Heinrich Schwartz. You vill see vot happen!”

Harry stared. The unnatural complacency of his grandfather troubled him.

“What do you mean?” he asked abruptly.

“Vot I say,” nodded the senior Schwartz, clapping his grandson resoundingly on the back.

Harry’s face whitened slowly. He was beginning at last to get the drift of the conversation.

“Do you mean you think—you believe I did it?” he shouted. “For God’s sake, grandfather!”

The old man stiffened into a rigid military attitude.

"You haf gain pig victory for Germany—*nicht wahr?*" he asked in a hoarse whisper. "You blow up der vicked factory—heh?"

The big veins swelled on Harry's forehead. He clenched his brown hands. But when at last he answered the proud old man, who had never forgotten the land of his birth, his voice was gentle.

"Grandfather," he said slowly, "I am an American. . . . You don't know what it means to be an American. But try to think, grandfather. I couldn't commit a crime which might have murdered hundreds of people. . . . I couldn't!"

His head drooped, as he perceived the fierce question which leaped to his grandfather's eyes.

"I ought never to have worked in the accursed place," he murmured humbly. "It was for money I did it."

"*Ya!*" growled the old man, "*for money you did it! Ach! You are an American, an' I—t'ink you are a hero!*"

Without another look at the boy who bore his name, old Schwartz went heavily away. . . . Harry heard the key turn in the lock.

XXVIII

"I 'M awfully proud of you, Hoddy dear," declared Mrs. Hobbs, as she set a platter containing three lamb-chops, fried after the American fashion, before her son.

"You've nothing to be proud of, mother," her son said gloomily.

"If you ain't dyed-in-the-wool British, clear to the backbone, Hoddy!" complained Mrs. Hobbs. "You'd ought to remember you're half-American."

He narrowed his eyes at the rapidly cooling chops.

"Why don't you eat your dinner, Hoddy?" inquired his mother, returning to the table after a trip to the gas-range with a dish of potatoes, also fried and exuding grease. "My! if you c'd hear my customers talk about you!"

"Damned glad I can't! . . . Don't listen to 'em, mother; and for God's sake, don't brag about me! I can't stand it."

"I don't see why you should be so cross about it, Hoddy," soothed his mother, setting a glass of jelly in convenient proximity to her son's plate. . . . "Try some of this nice rhubarb jell. Miss

Sadie Scrimger brought it over a-purpose for you. She's a real pretty girl, Hoddy; and she says everybody in town is talking about your brave acts at the explosion. I shouldn't wonder if you had a medal presented for saving life."

He choked wordlessly over a fragment of bread, which he was in the act of swallowing. His face was crimson as he set down his glass of water.

"They're talking about a Carnegie medal," pursued Mrs. Hobbs complacently. "And Mrs. Obed Salter says her husband was at the town-meeting last night, and your name was brought up prominently—— For goodness sake! Hoddy, what is the matter?"

Her son had pushed back his chair from his untasted meal.

"Don't you like your chops cooked that way?" inquired his mother solicitously. "Your father always said I couldn't cook a chop decent. . . . He had his notions, an' I guess you got yours, Hoddy. . . . Sometimes I almost wish I'd married an American: British ideas is so odd. . . . But when I think of that young man, shut up in jail for blowing up the plant, an' of the disgrace an' all his poor mother has to stand, I can't help feeling proud of *my* boy, an' glad he ain't got German blood. I should think you'd

feel real happy over it, Hoddy, instead of being so down in the mouth you can't eat your victuals. . . . Don't go yet: I got a nice apple pie for dessert. One of my customers brought it in when she came for her fitting. She thinks you're *just great*, Hoddy!"

He turned from the door, his hat jammed over his eyes.

"I'm going out," he said abruptly. "Don't wait supper for me, mother."

But when he reached the street he paused uncertainly, not observing the eager approach of a lady attired in black and white checks, her hat poised at a coquettish angle over one eye. It was Miss Electa Pratt, and she literally pounced upon the unobservant young man.

"Oh, *Mis-ter* Hobbs, I'm so glad I have an *opportunity* of *congratulating* you in *person*!" italicized Miss Pratt. "It was so *awfully* noble of you! I'm *sure* not *many* young men would do anything so *gr-rand*, risking your life and all. As I was telling aunty—perhaps you didn't know, but since dear mamma passed away I have the *sweetest* aunty in the *world* chaperoning me—'That noble Mr. Hobbs,' I says to Aunty Em, 'ought t' have a laurel wreath. An' I've a good mind to make one *for him myself*. It would be *awfully* becoming, don't y' know?'"

And Miss Electa giggled coyly, with the conviction that she had said something peculiarly English.

Kitchener Hobbs regarded the disturber of his solitude with stern self-control.

"Madam," said he, with a frowning dignity which Miss Electa later described as "perfectly fascinating, don't y' know?" "I beg that you will do nothing of the sort. I am not entitled to a laurel wreath, nor to your distinguished praise."

With that he whipped off his hat and strode away, before the lady could devise a valid excuse for detaining him.

He had definitely made up his mind where he was going. And he marched toward his objective point with all the courage needed to face a storm of shrapnel. It was Horatio Herbert Kitchener, with a very small admixture of Hobbs, who presently met Madeleine Desaye walking slowly along, all the sweet color gone from her face, her slight figure sagging like a slim birch tree under the bitter assault of the north wind.

Kitchener Hobbs halted her with a peremptory gesture.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"'Ome," she replied; but the word was an irrepressible sob.

"What is the matter with you?" was his succeeding inquiry. But he thought he knew.

She was mute before his searching gaze.

"You know I love you," he said sternly.

She looked up, her eyes unnaturally big and dark.

"I'm reminding you of this because I need—some sort of excuse—though of course there isn't any."

He paused to kick a pebble out of his path.

"Me—I love 'Arry," she quavered piteously.
"You know 'Arry——"

She choked, a slender hand at her throat. "I call heem Le Noir—jus' for fonnie. 'Arry 'e like zat name Le Noir; *mais* I 'ave now large *tristesse* to myself because I make zat fonnie."

He was gazing at her, his gray eyes full of the sadness she had confessed.

"Madeleine," he said slowly, "after today you will never see me again. . . . But before I go——"

He stopped short, further utterance suddenly impossible. Rain began to fall from the low-hanging clouds.

"I mustn't keep you standing here," he said hurriedly. "I—I'm rather a rotten sort of bounder—what I called Schwartz that night and—and afterward. But—I'm sorry—in time. I'm

going there now—to the inquiry, I mean. . . . Do you understand me? I'm afraid I can't speak decent French today."

She nodded.

"All person spik like pretty-kettle-o'-fish. Ev'ryboddie mad to 'Arry."

"Have you been there—at the hearing?"

"*Non, m'sieu'*, Mees Malvina, she say so. I am wait at cornaire—me."

"You should have told them how he got his name Le Noir."

"My fa'ter 'e not permit; 'e say to me, 'Go 'ome, Madeleine, *immédiatement*.' Me—I am make queek track."

The cold drops on her cheeks reproached him poignantly.

"See here," he said in a firm voice; "perhaps I have no right to be taking things into my own hands. But we've got to put up a stiff fight to save him, now. They're all against him, and the police have worked out a bloody chain of circumstantial evidence. Come on!"

"To 'im?" she breathed, a faint color staining her cheeks. . . .

The preliminary hearing, necessary to a formal indictment of Heinrich Schwartz, accused of wilfully causing the destruction of the Merks Muni-

tions Plant, was drawing to a close. The evidence against the accused had been strong, his defense weak. He had obtained employment under the alias, Le Noir, for the express purpose of concealing his German name. This much the prisoner had confessed. But so far, after the most rigid examination, continued throughout one entire night, the accused had stubbornly refused to divulge the names of his associates in crime. There was little doubt that the Government detectives would, during the course of the trial, succeed in unearthing a sinister, far-reaching plot, which would involve persons of the highest standing. The prisoner Schwartz, it was plain, was merely a tool in an august hand. This much the reporters had added to copious reports of the proceedings, to be hastily licked into shape for the evening papers, when two persons entered the crowded court-room.

The magistrate, a local official rather dazed by the spot-light of publicity thus suddenly focused upon him, was about to pronounce the words which would condemn the prisoner to the long torture of a trial by jury, with no uncertain outcome. It was evident that the magistrate had no doubt of the prisoner's guilt.

Calvin S. Northrup, counsel for the accused, kept his own private convictions well hidden under

a mask of frowning silence. He had made up his mind to prove his client insane. Having thus determined, Mr. Northrup rather resented the intrusion of fresh evidence, insisted upon by the two persons before mentioned when they had forced their way through the crowd.

The bunched reporters simultaneously noted the beauty of the girl and the stern good looks of the young man who accompanied her. The associated press photographer slipped a fresh plate into position, while the usual legal preliminaries were in progress. . . . The girl was permitted to testify first.

"*Oui, m'sieu'*, I am acquaint wiz 'Arry Schwartz. . . . Oh, for long time. I call heem *Le Noir* w'en to my fat'er I present heem. Me—I make of Sch-wartz one French name—you un'erstan'—*non?* My fat'er 'e ha-ate all such oglic German name as Sch-wartz—vary oglic, you see? Me—I like 'Arry; so easy-as-roll-from-log I queek translate: Sch-wartz—very dark, w'at you call black, like night—*Le Noir*. You see? . . . *Oui, m'sieu'*: 'Arry 'e like zat nize French name bettaire zan Sch-wartz. I give heem zat name; 'e like eet. . . . *Non, m'sieu'*, I not tell my fat'er such fonnice joke—not for long time. My fat'er, 'e ees vary mad to German: we are of Alsace, *m'sieu'.*"

Informed that the accused had already confessed to adopting the name Le Noir in order to obtain employment at the Merks plant, Mlle. Desaye blushed very sweetly.

"Me—I am aware," she said. "'Arry 'e like to earn monnie to make 'ouse. . . . You know w'at ees to make 'ouse—for marry?"

The reporters were writing like mad. Even the solemnly important magistrate smiled. He had once built a house for his bride. His next question brought the quick blood to the prisoner's face; but Madeleine answered it with sweet composure.

"*Oui*, m'sieu', 'Arry, 'e like to marry me—myself. I ex-plain to you: 'Arry 'e call heemself Le Noir to earn queek simoleon for 'ome. Fine elegant word—'ome. Me—I like to live in some nize 'ome of 'Arry."

Her glance at the prisoner was the merest flicker of long lashes, but it carried with it the sweetest assurance.

The associated press artist was recording impressionistic sketches as fast as his nimble pencil could work: "featuring" Madeleine Desaye as she gave her "deliciously quaint testimony," which entirely exonerated the accused from inventing the French alias for some "sinister purpose"; of the beautiful French girl taking her seat beside the

weeping mother of the prisoner; of the piquant profile of the witness with its delicately tip-tilted nose and the bewitching curve of lips and chin. He paused only for a deliberately appraising look at the young Englishman who succeeded Mlle. Desaye upon the stand.

"*Some name!*" murmured the nearest reporter, as he inscribed the hieroglyphs representing "Horatio Herbert Kitchener Hobbs" upon his pad.

Mr. Hobbs told his story baldly.

"I saw the accident," he stated. "A girl in the filling shed dropped a wire hairpin as she left the place. It somehow landed on the belt of the motor-driven shaft. There was a spark. It caused the explosion. . . . Schwartz wasn't near the place. I saw him in the yard—fifty feet or more away—two minutes before the explosion. He is innocent."

When asked why he had not come forward with this important bit of testimony before, Hobbs bit his lip and turned noticeably pale.

"I see no reason why you should ask that question," he said stiffly. "I was not called as a witness. . . . What I have told you is God's truth; what more do you want?"

After all, the magistrate was human. So were the lawyers and the reporters and the rest—in-

cluding the artist. There was a rigid cross-examination, of course, on the part of the prosecution, establishing certain technical points. But in the end the testimony of Horatio Herbert Kitchener Hobbs stood.

As the witness stepped down from the stand, M. Desaye—who stood with folded arms looking on at the scene—observed that he cast a single quick glance at Madeleine; but he did not attempt to speak to her. His face was sternly controlled as he replied monosyllabically to the questions showered upon him by the reporters. There were those who declared that the young Englishman refused to further enlighten the representatives of the press, and that he bolted from the room without so much as a word to the man he had saved. But in the light of later events, the conduct of Kitchener Hobbs earned him not even a nine days' wonder. Being out of sight in those days was tantamount to being swiftly forgotten. And no one in Innisfield—except perhaps the station-master at the departure of the evening train—ever set eyes upon young Hobbs after he left the court-room.

It was generally known on the following day that the Hobbsses had left town. Nobody appeared to know where they had gone. The sign, bearing the words "*Madame Louise, Robes*"

swung fitfully in the wind for perhaps a week longer. Then one day it was taken down and replaced by another, presenting to the public eye the advantages to be derived from a visit to the skilled chiropodist, one flight up.

And yet the disappearance of the American Mrs. Hobbs and her son, who was a British subject, was merely a logical sequence of preceding events. Mrs. Hobbs was busily engaged in draping a lay-figure with voluminous folds of mustard-colored voile when her son tramped heavily up the stair. Without a glance at his mother he sat down in a chair by the table, where the neglected dinner still sojourned amid its congealed grease.

"For goodness' sake, Hoddy!" exclaimed Mrs. Hobbs, removing a quantity of pins from between her teeth, "you wouldn't eat your dinner when it was nice and hot, and now——"

He turned his head slowly and looked at her.

Mrs. Hobbs was a commonplace person, with limited powers of insight and imagination, but not even the dullest woman could have gazed upon that tragic young face without a stirring of the emotions. Mrs. Hobbs dropped the mustard-colored stuff, while her scissors, hung by a cord about her neck, clashed noisily against the earthenware teapot as she leaned across the table.

"Hoddy!" she cried. "What has happened? Are you sick?"

Then she ran to him and took his comely head in her arms.

"Hoddy," she whispered, "what is it? Tell mother!"

He turned and buried his face on her shoulder.

"Oh, mother," he groaned, "I'm so bloody miserable!"

But she couldn't be made to understand the cause of his unhappiness, even after he had honestly tried to tell her everything.

"Why, Hoddy," she said, "I don't see why you should feel so bad over it. You haven't done anything to be ashamed of. You was a real hero at the fire, Hoddy. Everybody says so. Lots of folks would have been killed if it hadn't 'a' been for you. An' you say they let that Schwartz fellow off, after you went of your own accord and told. I think it was real noble of you."

The blood rushed to his temples and hammered there.

"You—you never can see," he choked. "It must be because you are——"

He swallowed his words with an effort.

"But, Hoddy dear, I wish you'd try an' be sensible, for once, an'——"

He fetched a deep breath.

"If you'd ever call me by my name," he murmured, despair in his voice.

She looked at him sharply.

"You mean you don't like I should call you Hoddy?" she said. "Why, I've always called you Hoddy since you were a baby."

"My name," he went on unsteadily, "is *Horatio Herbert Kitchener*, and I've allowed a man to go to jail—because I was—jealous. Does that convey anything to your mind? I meant to let him go to prison, or to death—anything to get him out of my way! I'm a liar—with *that name*. I'm a coward—with *that name*. I'm a murderer—with *that name*. My God, mother!"

Mrs. Hobbs sank weakly into a chair and mopped her eyes with a breadth of the mustard-colored stuff. In the silence, broken by his hard, wrenching sobs, she went back over the brief story of his life. . . . It seemed to her scarcely more than a year or so since he was a little, little boy, playing with his tops and marbles. . . . He always had such beautiful eyes, and his hair was like silk to the touch. . . . She found herself touching it now, almost timidly.

"Hoddy," she said, close to his ear, "I—I'm going to let you go. I'm not going to hold you back any longer—from the war, I mean. . . .

I'll go with you, Hoddy. You can enlist as soon as we get home. . . . I guess—maybe—you'd ought to, after all."

And having thus made the supreme renunciation, she was equal to what followed. . . .

XXIX

M. ETIENNE DESAYE sat in his favorite chair by the window in an attitude of deep dejection. All about him on the floor scattered newspapers, both French and English, bore witness to the fact that M. Desaye had been spending his Sunday in a characteristically American manner. His rumpled hair and the deep pucker between his brows evidenced the singular dissatisfaction he had derived from his survey of the world's doings. The house was very quiet, save for a moaning little wind, which seemed to be seeking entrance about the doors and windows of the shabby old house. . . . He wondered a little as to the whereabouts of his daughter Madeleine. He had not seen her since *déjeuner*, being dimly aware thereafter of her fresh young voice in the kitchen warbling certain old French *chansons* he had taught her when a child. Absorbed in a disquieting account of his country's economic condition, he had scarcely lifted his eyes from his reading when she paused for a moment on her way upstairs. . . . He had not heard her come down.

M. Desaye arose, spurning the illustrated edition with his foot. For perhaps ten minutes he marched up and down the room, unwonted thoughts stirring in his mind. . . . Where was Madeleine? He would go upstairs and see. But a visit to her nest of a chamber under the eaves revealed nothing save the evidences of a hasty toilet. M. Desaye picked up a knot of rose-colored ribbon exhaling a faint perfume. He sighed deeply. It had not been soberly considered—this coming to America. And now he felt that he must return. No longer could he remain enjoying an unearned and inglorious idleness, while France grew pale and cold from uncounted wounds.

“I am no less than a coward!” he told himself between clenched teeth.

But what of Madeleine? Had she been dearer to him than France? Was it because of her he had fled from his duty to this alien land, where even now the distant rumblings of war could be heard? Very gently he put down the rose-colored token of youth. It was as if he had laid Madeleine herself upon the blood-stained altar of his country. He had at length determined upon his course. Neither tears nor pleadings should deflect him from it. . . .

His brow was still corrugated with care when

half an hour later he presented himself in frock-coated elegance at the door of Mlle. Dubois-Bennett. He had come, he said, to seek counsel from *madame, sa mère*.

"Now, ain't that too bad!" regretted Miss Malvina, recognizing the importance of the occasion, as her eyes perused the person of her neighbor from his polished boots to the tri-color of France in his buttonhole. "Ma don't go out once in a coon's age; but t'day Mis' Adelbert Cummins—her t' was M'randy D'boise—come after Ma in her auto, 'n' I says t' Ma, 'You go right along,' I says, 'n' don't you come back tell you're good 'n' ready.' Mis' Cummins wanted Ma should stay all night, b'cause th' was a third cousin o' hern comin' t' dinner. So here I be, all b' m' lonesome. . . . But come right in, do! I'd b' pleased t' see you, even ef Ma ain't t' home."

M. Desaye hesitated for the fraction of a minute. It occurred to him that possibly he might be committing an indiscretion in thus visiting the unchaperoned Miss Malvina. But the sight of the glistening silver curls about her temples reassured him. He remembered that he was no longer young; neither was Miss Malvina. Much could be overlooked in the conduct of persons no longer young.

They were presently seated in the hair-cloth

parlor facing one another from two slippery chairs with carved rosewood backs, designed especially to remind frail mortals of the passage of the moments. M. Desaye gazed earnestly at Miss Malvina. She was wearing a lavender gown with a garniture of yellowish lace. Miss Malvina's cheeks were of an unwonted pink. Her eyes shone under her white curls.

"Say, first off, I want t' tell you the smart trick Mis' Rev'ren' Pettibone's yellow dog played on me yist'day," she began, without waiting for her visitor to unfold his errand. "Might's well speak right out—fer I see you can't help noticin' my loss. My nice black hair-front was a-layin' on a cheer, right where I c'd put m' hand on it ef the door-bell rang. I seen Philura 'n' the baby a-comin' in th' gate, th' dog a-followin' 'em 's large 's life. But, thinks s'I, Mis' Rev'ren' Pettibone knows my hair 's been gray sence I was twenty; so I left m' front a-layin' keerless. Well, th' baby, he set there on an old comfort I keep a-purpose f'r babies when their mas is bein' fitted—a-playin' with a string of empty spools, 'n' Fido, he set solemn 's a jedge a-watchin' th' baby. Mis' Pettibone was tellin' what a wonderful dog Fido Pettibone was—when she wa'n't r'latin' incidents about th' baby, with me a-listenin' patient, whilst I draped th' goods fer her skirt, like they do in

shur Paree, as Mis' Hobbs ust t' say,—when all of a suddent I noticed Fido. He was worryin' somethin' in th' corner an' growlin' fierce, an' th' baby was laughin' t' beat th' band. . . . He'd stole my hair-front! 'N' time we got it away from him th' wa'n't nothin' left but the foundation. I felt pretty well cut up over it. 'N' Philura, she said she'd buy me a new one in a nice mejum shade o' brown. But I says 'No; Mr. Pettibone's sal'ry,' I says, 'wa'n't planned for purchasin' lux'ries; 'n' b'sides,' I says, 'Fido didn't know no better.' I guess I told Mis' Pettibone a fib; but I says t' her I'd made up m' mind t' look old, 'n' be done with it. So here I be!"

M. Desaye had listened to Miss Malvina's explanation of her bereft condition with an air of profound interest, his occasional well-timed gestures and murmured comments sustaining the little lady's narrative to its conclusion.

"*Mes compliments* to Fido," he observed gently. "I have to t'ank zat mos' noble animal for deed of kin'ness perform."

"For th' land sake, do you mean t' tell me you like m' looks better without m' front?" demanded Miss Malvina excitedly.

"*Précisément*," murmured M. Desaye. "You 'ave now ze air *gentil*—*autrefois* regrettably lacking—*merci, grâce à Dieu!*"

"Well, I d'clare!" breathed Miss Bennett. "Ain't I r'lieved t' hear you say that! I s'posed, bein' French, you'd admire most anythin' stylish an' han'some. But ef you don't——"

Miss Malvina paused uncertainly, the faint color in her cheeks deepening to rose.

M. Desaye sighed.

"Dear friend," he said, "I am about to bid you adieu. I 'ave determine! I 'ave resolve! No longer I remain in America, supinely attentive to the groans of France. I go, I fly to offer my breast to the sword that seeks her life!"

M. Desaye had considered this eloquent explanation of his purposes with care, hence its bewildering effect upon his listener.

Miss Malvina's late blooming roses withered on the instant.

"You're a-goin' away?" she quavered. "You 'n' Mad'lane, jes' 's I—jes' 's Ma 'n' me was gettin'—gettin' ust t' hevin' you fer neighbors?"

"*Noblesse oblige*: I can no longaire remain," assented M. Desaye, with an eloquent gesture. "But of Madeleine I would spik. I regret to tear Madeleine from your mos' kin' affection an' ze discreet *curatelle* of *madame, votre mère*. Eet ees of zis I would spik beyond."

Miss Malvina sighed, her eyes seeking the window where an hour earlier she had watched

Madeleine walking with Harry Schwartz in an almost visible aureole of happiness.

"I sh'd cert'nly hope not," she agreed warmly, "considerin' Mad'lane's got a stiddy beau 'at can't be beat nowheres in France, t' say nothin' o' Europe. . . . When it comes t' husban's, a good, plain American is good enough fer *me*. . . . Ef you'll leave her with Ma Bennett 'n' me we'll take keer of her till Harry c'n afford t' git married."

M. Desaye frowned thoughtfully.

"Your country also faces war," he said. "But eet will not invade your 'omes, as in France."

He cast a swiftly appraising glance about the sparsely furnished room, his thoughts, meanwhile, sweeping the wider prospect of his past and future.

"Eet ees improbable I return," he said at length.

Two large tears welled up in Miss Malvina's eyes, trembled for an instant on her lashes, then without pretense of concealment rolled down her cheeks. M. Desaye observed the phenomenon gravely. It suggested a heretofore unconsidered way out of his dilemma.

He arose and with careful dignity bowed low before the lady who had thus honored him with her tears.

“ *Sans ceremonie, ma chère amie*, since ze hour eet ees brief, let me ask zat you do me ze *grand honneur* of becoming before my departure Madame Desaye. Mos’ ’appy I leave my Madeleine in your care. . . . You will consent—*oui?* ”

Miss Malvina trembled to her feet.

“ What—what—— You want I should—— I’m afraid I don’t—— ”

“ I am reques’ zat you ’onor me by marry—I regret I ’ave not *propaire* Englis’ to spik an’ no *dictionnaire* in pocket. . . . You un’erstan’ me—*oui?* ”

“ Well, I ain’t *quite* a ninny,” said Miss Malvina, recovering her self-possession: “ you want I should marry you, so ’s to look after Mad’lane when you’re gone back to France. I guess that’s about th’ size of it.”

She nodded emphatically.

“ Ah-h! You ’av spik mos’ noble! I t’ank you, dear frien’, you s’all not eet regret, I promise! ”

Miss Malvina submitted, as on previous occasions, to the touch of bearded lips upon her hand. A wave of rose-colored mist appeared to enfold her.

M. Desaye was of a sudden radiant, loquacious. Like one in a dream she heard him setting forth his plans for an immediate marriage, with incom-

prehensible details concerning *apanage* and *dot*. Also, he apologized profusely for not having asked the honor of her hand in marriage from Madame Dubois-Bennett, as was indeed right and proper.

Miss Malvina roused herself at this.

"I don't know es Ma 'll hev any reel objections t' offer," she said, with dignity. "'N' I guess mebbe I'm old enough t' speak f'r m'self."

Then, without warning, a sob escaped her tremulous lips.

"I wisht I wa'n't s' old," she whispered. "Ef I was only young 'n'—'n' han'some, like 's not you—— But, land! I guess you'll think I'm crazy fer thinkin' o' such a thing."

She wiped her eyes and sealed up her tears with an energetic sniff.

M. Desaye was looking at her very kindly. If he did not entirely comprehend her thoughts, his Gallic sympathies suggested his quick rejoinder:

"*Hélas!*" he murmured, "eet ees true we aire no longer possess of *la jeunesse*; but I fin' you mos' *charmante*, *chère* Mees Malvina. For you I s'all ever cheris' *la consideration profonde*."

Miss Malvina smiled bravely.

"I'll be good t' Mad'lane," she said, "'n' I hope she won't mind me bein' her stepmother. . . . Course I—I c'n see why you thought o'

marryin' me. . . . 'Tain't like we was young folks. . . . But I—I'd reelly like t' stan' up t' be married in a white dress. I c'n keep it put away, afterwards—t' look at, 'n' r'member."

Again M. Desaye's active imagination rose to the occasion. He took Miss Malvina's work-worn little hand in his.

"*Chère amie*," said he, "I 'ave not deserve such *bonheur*. On far-distant battlefield I s'all also remembaire."

From his finger he drew a ring, fashioned of gold and bearing a heraldic devise of dragons in deadly combat. Miss Malvina's fingers were rough with needle pricks and her joints bore witness to rheumatic pains humbly borne; but the quaint old ring, treasured through many generations, slipped easily into place.

"For *remembaire* of mos' happy *heure*," he said gently.

XXX

WHEN Ma Bennett, fairly brimming over with details of her visit to Mrs. Adelbert Cummings, arrived home on the following afternoon, she found her daughter surrounded by breadths of shimmering white material, which she was busily engaged in fashioning into a gown.

"For th' land sake, Malviny," exclaimed the old lady, "that looks like a weddin'-dress."

Miss Malvina's needle described a sort of flying arc of basting stitches about a small arm-size.

"'Tis," she said briefly.

"Who in creation 's goin' t' git married?" inquired Ma.

"I bet you couldn't guess, ef you was t' try a year," twinkled Miss Malvina. "'Twas unbeknownst t' me till yist'day."

Ma Bennett sat down heavily, her eyes blinking behind her far-sighted specs.

"Is it Sadie Buckthorn?" she inquired. "I heared she's keepin' comp'ny with a young man from Boston."

"Nope," said Miss Malvina, inserting a long seam under the needle of her machine and snapping down the presser-foot, "'tain't anybody you'd ever think,—nor me, neither, f'r that matter. I thought I sh'd have a double duck-fit when I heared of it."

Ma Bennett gazed searchingly at her daughter's face during the deafening whir which marked the passage of the shining white stuff under the busy needle.

"You do look kin' of worked up, even yit," she commented. "When's th' weddin' comin' off?"

"A Wednesday afternoon, at four o'clock, at th' pars'nage," particularized Miss Malvina, smiles rippling over her face like breezes over a wheat-field. . . . "My! I guess most everybody 'll be some s'prised when it gits out a Thursday."

"Malviny Bennett, who's goin' t' git married?" demanded Ma, with rising asperity. "You cert'nly kin be th' aggravatin'est person, when you're a min' to."

"You're invited t' th' ceremony, Ma," offered Miss Malvina, evading the maternal wrath with a demure smile of protest.

"*Me?—invited!* I don't b'lieve no sech thing."

"True 's preachin'; 'n' so be I, Ma. I got out your bes' black silk this mornin' early, whilst I was waitin' fer the stores t' open, an' I fixed the waist 'n' put some real han'some lace on the sleeves. You'll look scrum'tious, Ma."

"What you goin' t' wear, Malviny?" inquired the old lady suspiciously. . . . "I'll bet you're jes' foolin', anyhow. I sh'd think you'd rather hear me tell 'bout Mis' Adelbert Cumminses new parlor furnitur'."

Miss Malvina canted her curly head to one side, as she gazed earnestly at the inchoate garment in her lap.

"I got t' hurry so like all possess t' git this 'ere dress done b' t'morrow night, I ain't really got time t' dig up any curiosity," she said. "It's a-goin' t' be made up princess, with a trail: I can't abide these 'ere short skirts with a breadth o' goods tacked on the back, like they're wearin' now. This 'ere is goin' t' be a reg'lar weddin'-dress. How d' you like the goods, Ma? Ain't it shiny an' pretty—kind o' like my hair, when you come t' think of it. . . . I guess 'twould be right becomin'—*t' me*."

"Well, I guess you've gone plumb crazy, Malviny," commented the old lady sternly. . . . "I want a cup o' tea, 'n' I want it good 'n' hot."

"Teapot's on th' stove, Ma. . . . Say, don't

y' want t' know who's a-goin' t' step off in this 'ere dress?"

"I don't know 's I do," sniffed Ma. "When folks is 's smart an' uppity 's you be, I b'lieve in lettin' 'em alone tell they git good an' ready——"

"*It's me, Ma!*" cried Miss Malvina, laughing, but with a mist in her eyes which momentarily obscured the glistening bridal web. "I'm a-goin' t' marry our neighbor, Mis-ter Dassay, so 't he c'n go t' th' war over in France 'n' leave Mad'-lane. . . . Y'see I'll be her step-ma, 'n' you'll be her gran'ma; won't that be lovely?"

"*Mal-viny Bennett!*" screamed the old lady. "You ain't tellin' me th' gospel truth?"

"Yes, I be, Ma! It's jest as true as I'm a-settin' in this 'ere cheer, a-sewin' on m' own weddin'-dress. He asked me yist'day, 'n' I says, 'Yes.' Thinks s'I, folks'd ought t' 'commodate their neighbors. . . . Want t' see m' engagement ring?"

Confronted with this visible token of the impending event, Ma Bennett gasped.

"Ain't you some older 'n he is?" she inquired feebly.

"I don' know, 'n' I don't keer a cotton hat!" stated Miss Malvina. "The' wa'n't nothin' said about ages. . . . But I guess he ain't s' awful

young but what he knows his mind, 'n' I ain't, neither. . . ."

The little dressmaker's head drooped low over the buttonhole she was fashioning.

"'Tain't—'tain't, so t' say, a weddin' like mos' folks," she breathed. "He—he's a-goin' off th' same day—on th' 'leven o'clock train. We're goin' t' hev supper over t' his house. 'N' he wants we sh'd go over there t' live after he's gone. He's bought th' house off Mis' Rev'ren' Pettibone 'n' put it in my name. He says you an' me 'll never hev t' want, Ma. He's got ev'rythin' fixed so th' 'll be money comin' in reg'lar, with a dot fer Mad'lane's settin' out, when she comes t' git married, 'n' all. The' ain't nothin' he ain't thought of. An' Mad'lane says she loves me like a mare, a'ready; but that don't mean horse, Ma, though it does sound like it."

"Where'd you say he's a-goin'," inquired the old lady, "—t' Boston?"

She appeared to have retreated into the dim mists of age, where echoes from the outer world reach the ear faintly. She fumbled with her bonnet strings, her old hands trembling.

"Land! I'd ought t' 'a' got your hot tea, first off," said her daughter contritely. "Here, you set right down, Ma, 'n' I'll git it ready in two

jerks of a lamb's tail. You're all tuckered out, what with your visit 'n' all. . . ."

Mrs. Pettibone was attired in her best brocade dress, exhibiting large purple flowers on a black background, though it was only half-past three in the afternoon. It was a handsome dress; Mrs. Pettibone rustled in its ample folds so richly that the baby's wide bright eyes exhibited his pleased surprise. He even refrained from his wonted squeal when his mother invested his small person in a clean white dress, the sleeves of which were a trifle small as compared with his chubby fists.

"You've got to wear it, precious," cooed Mrs. Pettibone, "because Aunty Bennett made it for you, and you're going to stand up at her wedding. . . . There now, mother's lamb—my! how sweet he is. . . . Doesn't it seem a pity, Silas?"

Mr. Pettibone, engaged in knotting a fresh white tie, glanced at his family with a grave smile.

"Do you mean that it is a pity the baby is sweet, my dear?" he inquired.

"Of course not! I was thinking of Malvina."

"Hm-m."

"Seeing the baby looking so perfectly *darling*—well, you know, I couldn't help thinking how dreadful to be a widow on one's wedding day.

It amounts to that, of course. If he goes to France and gets killed——”

“It’s just possible M. Desaye may survive,” suggested the minister. “Some do, you know.”

‘He’s going to offer his breast to the German bayonets; Malvina said so; and if a person does that——”

“I believe they’re coming, my dear Philura,” interposed the minister hastily. “Do try and be your optimistic self. One should hold the thought——”

“Yes, of course! I’m going to *insist* that he’s coming back safe, some day or other. . . . Silas, *do* you think we’re going to have war in this country?”

The minister was saved from the pain of avowing his convictions on this point by the arrival of the wedding party. And presently they were all gathered in the hushed parlor, which had witnessed so many marriages in days past: Miss Malvina, in her snowy splendors; M. Desaye, stern and pale, as he thought of his future; Ma Bennett, dim and ancient as some faded daguerreotype; Madeleine, tremulous between grief and joy, and Harry Schwartz, awed into almost rigid gravity by the talk he had had with Madeleine’s father a few hours since. Mrs. Pettibone, in her rustling brocade, reminiscent of her own wedding,

held her baby close while the solemn words were being spoken, from the "Dearly beloved, we are assembled——" to the final sonorous "Amen."

There followed the strange little silence which seems quite as much a part of the ceremony as the wedding ring; then M. Desaye, looking very tall and elegant in his rather shabby frock coat with the tri-color of France in its buttonhole, bent over his bride and deliberately kissed her on the lips.

"*My wife*," he whispered, with all the generous warmth of a nature which could envision the belated and frost-bitten romance she would cherish to the end.

Yet it was not a sad wedding. The bride wore a radiant look which forbade all futile sympathy.

"He was bound t' go, anyhow," she told Mrs. Pettibone, "'n' now I got a right t' think of him affectionate, 'n' I c'n talk ev'rythin' over with Mad'lane. Besides, Ma 'n' me's goin' t' live in a nice house, with runnin' water 'n' all, an' we'll hev Mad'lane—t' love an' t' cherish."

Her voice broke a little over the last words, but her smile was all sunshine as she embraced and kissed the girl who wept in her arms.

"That's right, deary," she soothed her, "jes' you cry it out on mother's shoulder 'n' you'll feel better. . . . An' here 's Harry a-longin' t' com-

fort you, too. Oh, we're a-goin' t' take care o' this little girl; ain't we, Harry?"

"Yes, Miss Malvina," said Harry firmly, "we will!"

Mrs. Pettibone, holding up the baby to be kissed, smiled.

"We shall all be obliged to remember that our dear Miss Malvina is Madame Desaye, now," she said.

The bride looked startled.

"*Madame Desaye?*" she repeated wonderingly. "Well, I d'clare t' goodness that part of it never occurred t' me: I've been so took up with all that's happened, 'n' like that. But here I be, sure's you live—*Madame Desaye!* Well, I guess!"

But reflections of a practical sort could wait until tomorrow. Of today—her wedding day—there yet remained several golden hours, as bright as the shining new ring upon her hand, which M. Desaye had put there to keep the other company. There was the supper, for one thing, cooked and served by Mrs. Louisa Wessells, with divers amendments by Madeleine. To be sure, no one of the party, with the possible exception of Ma Bennett, knew what they were eating. Miss Malvina—no longer—sat at the head of the table in her shining bridal white, with M. Desaye

opposite; Harry and Madeleine, their hands clasped under the cloth, faced Ma, who was informing Mrs. Wessells that the tea was "stun cold." . . .

"If I wa'n't teetotally flabbergasted," declared Mrs. Wessells, as she described the scene later in the various kitchens of her clientele. "I don' know 's I'd 'a' b'lieved my years, ef anybody'd told me about that dinner. . . . Yes'm, they had wine; but t'was this 'ere kind, made in France, they say don't make folks drunk. It didn't make me drunk, fer I took down 's much a teacup full out in the kitchen afterwards, an' I only broke one veg'table dish 'n' two o' them cass'-rolls, es she calls 'em. I says t' Miss Malvina, 'Ain't you a member of the W. C. T. U.?' I says, jes' like that. 'Hush,' s' she, 'it's only fer this once,' s' she—'t' drink toast with.' 'Toast!' I says; 'I ain't made no *toast*, 'n' what's more, I ain't a-goin' to; you got more 'n 'nough, 's 'tis,' I says. Well, they kep' it up fer more 'n an hour. . . . I didn't git home till past nine o'clock. She wanted I should wash up all them dishes, 'n' I done it. . . . Yes'm, she set there, eatin' her p'rtaters 'n' meat in a white silk dress, all trimmed up with lace an' pearl tossells, an' a big bunch o' white roses layin' alongside on th' table. . . . Yes'm, I sh'd 'a' thought she'd a-wanted t' put

on somethin' plainer t' eat her victuals in; but she didn't. 'N' bimeby I seen her out in the yard with *him*. . . . Yes'm, she was a-trailin' that there white dress o' hern right down th' front steps. . . . No'm, I didn't ketch what he said to her. But he's gone all right. That fur'n girl o' hisn told me he was goin' t' th' war, when she give me m' two dollars. . . . Yes'm, he left her a grass widder th' same day they was married; but I guess she'll be *sod* all right, afore th' year's out: he'll either git drowned by one o' them nasty suds-m'reens, they talk about s' much; er else he'll git killed over there. The' ain't s' much t' pick 'n' choose be'twixt 'em, 's I says t' Georgie. . . ."

But it was not of their uncertain future the newly wedded pair spoke, as they walked arm and arm in the moonlight. That the moon chanced to be at its full was a matter for wondering happiness to the bride.

"I always kind o' hankered t' go walkin' in th' moonlight along with a beau," she confided to her companion; "'n' here I be—a-walkin' out—with you."

His hand sought hers.

"Of a possibility we s'all again make togezzer ze *promenade*," he said. "Eet ees of zis you mus' sink."

After a pause he added:

"I 'ave still ze *regret profond* for Madeleine. My daughter s'ould not marry wiz a German."

"Who, Harry? Harry ain't a German! Course he ain't! Lots o' times I've heared Mis' Schwartz—her 'twas M'lissy Meadowcroft—tell about her great-gran'father, Cap'n Meadowcroft. He was English, 'way back in ol' colony days, 'n' he married a real Injun princess—I forgit her name; so y' see Harry ain't German, no more 'n I be. He's *reel* American, Harry is, an' he'll take awful good keer of Mad'lane. He's a-goin' t' build a bran' new house, Mis' Schwartz told Ma so."

M. Desaye shook his head.

"Not *à présent*," he said. "I 'ave advise heem no—for now. Beyond, ze skies in America aire dark wiz war, *aussi* your country owes to France red blood of patriot."

He glanced hurriedly at his watch.

"But of zis, *suffisamment*. . . . To you, *chère amie*, I devote my las' moment. . . . You will be 'appy—*n'est-ce-pas?* All my bes' treasure I am leave wiz you. . . ."

Her upturned face, pale with anticipated grief, seemed the face of youth in the dim moonlight.

"I'm a-goin' t' miss you somethin' fierce," she confessed. "But—but I'm glad I c'n—love you

—after you're gone. . . . You won't mind—'way out there? Course I know why we was married, 'n' all; 'n' I ain't a-goin' t' worry Mad'lane none b' takin' on. . . . I'm a-goin' t' be reel bright an' cheerful 'n' take good keer of your—bes'—treasure."

"Ah-h! You 'ave love me—a leetle, *n'est-ce-pas?*" he wondered. "'Ow I am 'appy to 'ear zat! In France I remembaire—my wife, my child—togezzar in my 'eart, *toujours*."

Then because her steadfast face quivered beneath his gaze, he gathered the small white figure in his arms.

"Togezzar—in my 'eart—alway," he murmured. . . .

L'ENVOI

To M. Etienne Desaye,
Somewhere in France:

“My dear & respected Husband: Your letters to me & Madeleine come this morning. To say we was fairly keeled over with joy is to put it mild. Madeleine has been writing to you in French all morning, but I ain't up to snuff yet. But I'm coming on. Me & Madeleine talk French most all the time, doing up dishes & like that. Even Ma has learned how to ask for the butter, and is her tea biling hot. I will say it makes a nice change to hear it said in a furren language. Well, Husband, you had ought to see how nice we are fixed, now we are all living in our own home together. Madeleine insisted I was to sleep in your room & Ma sleeps in the room over the front hall, being next to me, with Madeleine over the dining-room, as before. Everything is house-cleaned & looking as neat as wax. I was put in mind of the day after you moved in and I come over to help, being a next-door neighbor. I ain't never forgot how you wanted to *pay* me. I guess I got paid all right, naze-pa?

“I grieve to tell you you was dead right about the war. We are a going to have one, & Harry Schwartz has enlisted in the Navy. He says it is

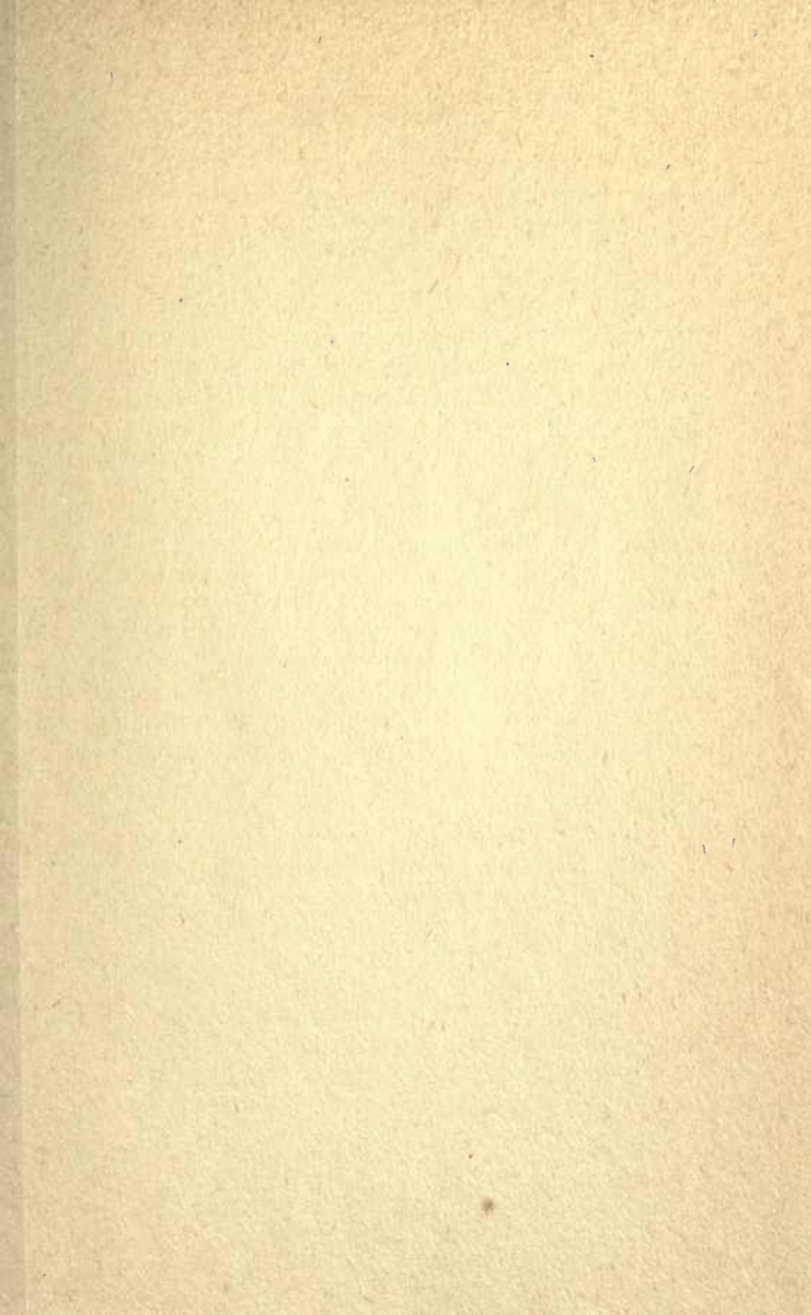
strictly up to him to prove he is an American citizen, after all thats come & gone. Madeleine is real brave & only cries nights, sometimes. Then I go in & cuddle her up, like I was her mother. She is a real little comfort & we love each other dearer every passing day. I see your looks in her constant, more especial your eyes & the cant of the head in talking.

“There is one thing I have to tell you which mebbe you wont like so well. But I made up my mind twas best, all things considered. You probly relect I been sewing most all my life & to set and baste a seam by the window, with an eye to the passing, comes natural to me. Well, Husband, after folks found out I was married I guess most every woman in this town come to see me. They could not seem to realize it, first off. But when I showed off my two rings they was forced to believe. Like as not you will snicker right out when I tell you I felt real mad to have all the folks calling me *Miss Malvina*, same as before. That ain't my rightful title, I says to Mis Deaconess Buckthorn. I am a married woman, I says to her, full as much as you be, & my name is *Madame Desaye*. You can ask the Revrend Pettibone, I says, & he will tell you tis gospel truth. Well, Husband, what with the above, & all the women folks pestering the life out of me to make up their spring suits, I give in at last & sent for Henry Pratt to paint me a sign, reading *Madame Desaye, Robes*. I guess folks will soon learn my rightful name seeing it on the front of the house *in gold letters*. Made-

leine views all my acts sensible & she ain't a mite of objection to anything I done. I calklate to save all extry cash for Madeleine's *dot*, as you & her call it. 'Twont do no harm, I says, to leave money a laying in the bank for a spell. I hope you will think I done right, more especial about the sign. It cost me three twenty-five, being war prices. While I set writing this, at the desk in your room up-stairs, I see our Madeleine talking to Harry Schwartz down by the front gate. He expects to join his ship to-morrow, so the poor young things is going through what *we* did, not so long ago. I found the waist of my wedding dress all spotted up with tears, when I come to lay it away in blue paper to keep it from turning yellow, & right off the bat I put a handsome double cascade of lace on to cover it. It looks full as stylish as before, if not stylisher, but I ain't a going to forget whats in under them lace frills as long as I live. Those spots was true heart tears for one I love more than tongue can tell, like it says in the Bible. I hope this letter finds you in health.

“Very respectfully, Your affectionate wife,
Malvina Dubois-Bennett Desaye.

“P. S. *Some name, Naze-pa?*”





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